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By FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.



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# THE JAILER'S PRETTY WIFE.

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## I

SINCE the days when Picard's comedy, *The Little Town*, was performed at the Théâtre Français, there has been little or no change in provincial life. The railway, the electric telegraph, and the half-penny newspapers have wrought some slight modifications. There are more commercial travellers, there is more postal intercourse, and provincials are familiar with the names of a few Parisian celebrities; still, matters have remained much the same under all forms of government. The public prosecutor may have figured successively as the king's prosecutor, the imperial prosecutor, or the prosecutor of the republic, but those he lives among are still in a backward state; electors continue to vote for the ministerial candidates and the middle classes spend their time as they spent it sixty years ago, talking politics and slandering their neighbours. Latitude and longitude make no difference. East, west, north, or south, all small towns in France are alike in this respect. A person who is familiar with one, knows all the others.

However, this does not apply so much to the villages or to the capitals of the different departments; the best type of the little town is the sub-prefecture; and at the beginning of the year preceding the establishment of the Second Empire, there was one such locality so constituted that the inhabitants were as happy as fish in water, whilst any Parisian visitor was destined to be bored to death there. Lost in the depths of the wild province of Périgord, Salviac, upon the Dronne, has never boasted a population of more than five thousand souls, who in 1852 only communicated with the rest of the world by means of an antiquated diligence, drawn by two scraggy horses. The inhabitants were none the less satisfied with their lot, and proud of their native city, which is picturesquely perched on the edge of a ravine, through which there flows a stream as clear as crystal.

There were no millionaires there it is true, but plenty of well-to-do citizens who aspired to the possession of a million, and who may have since managed to secure one. No wealthy manufacturers either, or great merchants; nothing but petty bondholders, living on their incomes, petty landowners and petty traders. Still Salviac was quite a business centre, and every market day, the gentlemen farmers of the district round about flocked there in their tilburys and breaks or else on horseback, to spend the afternoon in playing *besique* in the modest apartments of the local club. For there was a club at Salviac, the Philological Club, so-called perhaps because the members habitually spoke the dialect of Périgord there. None of the members ruined themselves by play, though they sometimes quarrelled, for

the natives of the Dordogne are hot-blooded, they are partially Gascons ; and when they become excited they are not easily calmed.

At the time this story begins, Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* of the second of December was still quite a recent event, and the country was in a very turbulent state. Salviac had not rebelled, but Salviac lacked enthusiasm, and in the district round about there had been various outbreaks promptly repressed by the gendarmes ; one of them so serious that the leader of it, arrested weapon in hand, was now in prison awaiting his fate ; while some of his accomplices, less fortunate than himself, were already on their way to Cayenne or Lambessa. Under these circumstances, the townspeople were greatly excited, for while submitting to the new rule, they took a deep interest in the leaders of this insurrection, and treated the newly installed authorities with a reserve bordering on coldness.

The former sub-prefect had been replaced by a young fellow dispatched from Paris for the express purpose of setting public opinion right. The public prosecutor and his assessor eagerly helped him in this task, and only the local judges ventured to show any indifference, probably because they considered that they could not be removed from office.

The general state of things naturally cast a gloom over the spirits of the Philologists. The town officials frequented the club as usual, some from a fear that they would be accused of sulking, others to carry on a propaganda in favour of the Prince-President. The townspeople evinced a similar disinclination to desert it, but they held their tongues, in order not to compromise themselves. As for the noblemen of the neighbourhood, almost all of them strong royalists, they censured the *coup d'état* in unmeasured terms, and their warlike attitude greatly alarmed the peaceable middle classes. As a very natural result, the club meetings were much less cheerful and less numerous than formerly, even on market days, for the gentlemen farmers, as a sign of their discontent, returned home before night-fall.

One Saturday, however, the last in the month of January, a heavy snow-storm rendered the roads well-nigh impassable, and the magnates of the neighbourhood, compelled to remain overnight at the local hosteleries, agreed to spend the evening at the club. At eleven o'clock they were still there, and their presence being an attraction, several bigwigs of Salviac were keeping them company. Even M. Bourdeille, the Presiding Judge of the Civil Tribunal, was indulging in a game of whist, at five sous the point, having as his partner the Count de Sigoulès, once a bodyguard of King Charles X., and as his opponents, M. Lorcières, a banker, and M. Braconne, the leader of the local bar.

The club-rooms were not luxuriously furnished, but they were very pleasantly located on the ground floor of the largest and handsomest house in the town, the windows overlooking a terrace which commanded a view of the valley of the Dronne. That night the mountains beyond the river were arrayed in a snowy mantle, the trees had been seemingly powdered by Father Winter, unbroken silence reigned without, and the light from the windows of the card-room streamed down upon a deserted thoroughfare.

"Three tricks and two by honours, that's won," said M. de Sigoulès, throwing down his cards.

"Give us our revenge," cried his less fortunate opponents.

"No, it is too late ; besides, I don't feel like playing cards. I took a hand merely to please our dear judge, but when I think that poor Adhémar de Mussidan is in prison, I reproach myself for indulging in amusements."

"Confess that Monsieur de Mussidan deserves punishment, count," said the banker Lorcières. "To march upon Salviac at the head of fifty peasants was a serious offence. The young fellow risked being shot."

"I should have preferred that. He would then have died like a soldier, while now he will be sent to die of fever at Cayenne. By the way, your charming sub-prefect has refused me permission to see him. I first applied to the superintendent of the prison, who unceremoniously shut the door in my face. Where did that bull-dog of a jailer come from? He isn't a native of this region."

"No," replied M. Braconne, "he was sent to us from Paris, as a New Year's gift. He is a rough old trooper, but his wife is young and pretty, and it is said that he owes his promotion to her."

"A complacent husband, probably. Ah, our new masters choose pretty subordinates."

"Hush, my dear count," said M. Bourdeille, "you are frightening everybody away."

Indeed, some timid citizens were stealing quietly out, while others pretended to be absorbed in their newspapers. However, the count quickly retorted: "I am not afraid of anybody. Nobody shall prevent me from saying what I think about this or any other matter. I would say as much to the very face of the commissary who arrived here only three days ago, and who has already sent five or six poor devils to Cayenne, among them one of my tenants, Pierre Chancelade, a worthy fellow and a republican—though that did not prevent him from following Adhémar, who only thought of fighting for the royal cause."

"Old Chancelade wasn't a bad fellow," replied M. Lorcières. "It was his son Louis, the schoolmaster, who urged him to take up arms, while carefully remaining at home himself."

"Louis would certainly have been mixed up in the affair, but for his sister," remarked the presiding judge, "and I am glad that he kept aloof, for he is a very estimable young fellow, in spite of his radical opinions. But suppose we give these gentlemen a chance to retrieve their fortunes," continued the judge, thinking that the old nobleman had gone far enough.

"Very well, it may calm me a little," replied Sigoulès. "But it will be your fault if I make a revoke."

The cards were again dealt, and they were about to resume playing, when the door was abruptly thrown open, and two gentlemen, one of them old and the other young, entered the room.

"Ah, here comes the sub-prefect!" grumbled the count; "who is that with him?"

"The commissary general," replied M. Braconne. "Why the deuce did you prevent me from leaving?"

The government delegate was a fine-looking man, tall, vigorously built, and very dark, with an erect carriage and heavy black moustaches. An old soldier unquestionably, and fitted to fulfil important missions. The sub-prefect, on the contrary, was evidently a fashionable Boulevardier, placed in office by some influential protector. "Don't let us disturb you, gentlemen," he remarked courteously to some members who rose to do honour to the authorities. "The commissary leaves to-morrow, and I was anxious to show him the beautiful view of the snow-clad mountains which you must have from these windows."

The whist-players had not moved, and the count cast withering glances

at the pitiless official who had sent his tenant into exile and cast his cousin into prison.

"Wouldn't this be a superb setting for the last scene of a melodrama?" the sub-prefect continued, after leading the commissary to the window.

The words had scarcely passed his lips, when one of the window-panes was shattered into fragments by a bullet. Every one sprang up at the same instant, the whist-players as well as the other members, but at first no one perceived that the bullet had hit its mark. The sub-prefect, who had escaped unhurt, courageously threw the window open, and shouted at the top of his lungs: "Arrest him!" But just as he shook his fist at the man who had fired, the commissary placed his hand upon his breast, turned and fell like a lump of lead.

Several persons sprang forward to raise him; the Comte de Sigoulès, in spite of his political animosity, being among the number. But it was too late. The bullet had struck the unfortunate government delegate in the heart, and a physician who chanced to be present had only to glance at the wound to realise that it was mortal. The spectators of the tragedy now darted from the room shrieking murder, and there only remained the Count de Sigoulès, M. Bourdeille, the sub-prefect, and two or three citizens, who were either less cowardly than the others, or more anxious to win the favour of the chief official of the district.

"It is a deed of political vengeance," murmured M. Bourdeille the judge.

"This is what comes of persecuting poor people," growled the old nobleman.

"Gentlemen," interrupted the sub-prefect, "the murderer must not be allowed to escape. I saw him; he fled towards the river. Run to the head-quarters of the gendarmerie, while I give chase." As he spoke, he sprang out of the window, which was not more than six feet above the terrace, and he was quickly followed by a clerk of the local registry office, who happened to be present.

These gentlemen certainly deserved credit for pursuing the murderer, for he perhaps had another bullet in reserve for any possible pursuer. But a man will risk many things for the sake of promotion. However, the murderer had disappeared, leaving visible traces in the snow. After climbing a low wall that bordered the terrace, he had started down the steep slope bordering the Dronne, a slope covered with rocks and shrubs well calculated to shelter a fugitive. Was he lurking there, or had he continued his flight to the bottom of the incline? The sub-prefect did not take time to reflect upon this point, however, but rushed on, only pausing when he reached the edge of the river, considerably in advance of his self-constituted assistant.

They were both young and equally ambitious. On reaching the age of twenty-seven, Charles Vignory, the son of a Paris merchant, had made such good use of his opportunities for enjoyment, that there remained to him but a few thousand francs of his patrimony. Gambling, suppers, and the fair sex had devoured all the rest, and his appointment as sub-prefect, which he owed to an influential comrade, had opportunely removed him from Boulevardian life. It had cost him a struggle to leave Paris, but he trusted that he would not long vegetate at Salviac, but be removed to more congenial surroundings. The young clerk who had gone to his assistance was named Martial Mouleydier, and he was a native of Salviac. He possessed but scanty means; but nature having endowed him with a handsome

face, he dreamed of making a wealthy marriage. He and Vignory were fitted to understand one another, and as he had already rendered sundry services to the sub-prefect, he was treated almost as an equal, at least in private, by the government official.

"Where has the scoundrel gone to?" asked Vignory, drawing breath after his rapid run. "He may have swum across the river, but I can't say that I have any desire to do so on a night like this."

"There are no tracks in the snow, hereabouts," replied Mouleydier. "I am inclined to think that he stopped half-way down the hill, and then ran back to the town while we were coming down here. He has had plenty of time to get there before now, and I am afraid we sha'n't succeed in overtaking him."

"But I must capture him. I have no intention of missing an opportunity that presents itself but once in a life-time. Think of it, my dear fellow, poor Monsieur Santelli was commissary-general for six departments. If the murderer of such an important personage remains unpunished, there will be nothing left for me but to pack my trunk; while, if I secure the murderer, I shall at least receive the cross of the Legion of Honour."

"You will get it, sir. He surely can't escape, even if the gendarmes fail to meet him. It is a political crime, and we shall only have to search for the culprit among the enemies of the government."

"Yes; and especially among the friends of the men that Monsieur Santelli has just had transported."

"Among the friends of that old revolutionist, Chancelade, for instance. Only a few moments before your arrival at the club, the Count de Sigoulès was railing against the government on account of the punishment it had inflicted upon his tenant. I fail to understand why the old aristocrat should feel aggrieved to see the country freed from a rabid republican."

"Extremes meet sometimes, my dear fellow; but this petty noble isn't the man to employ a murderer. We must seek the culprit elsewhere. But what can have become of him?"

"I feel satisfied that he must have returned to the town."

"But how? The rocks rise almost perpendicular everywhere excepting here in front of us. A rope may have been thrown to him from one of the houses near the edge of the cliff, however."

"That is not impossible. I know several houses hereabouts occupied by people of bad repute. It would be as well to search them, though he may have made his way back to the terrace, and gone round the club-house. They have all lost their senses up there. See, the window is still open, the rooms are still lighted, and persons are hurrying to and fro. The public prosecutor and his assessor must have arrived."

"And my place is with them," said Vignory, gravely. "I will join them, and we will begin the inquiry at once."

"Ah! here are the gendarmes, sir," eagerly cried Mouleydier at this moment.

"Let us wait for them, then."

There were two of them in command of a sergeant, and they were advancing as rapidly as their weighty equipments would permit.

"Have you seen the man?" cried Vignory.

"No, sir," replied the sergeant, lifting his hat.

"Then, begin by searching carefully among the bushes on the hill-side. If you find him, and he tries to escape, break his leg with a bullet. But

don't kill him, for I want to take him alive. If you don't find him, come and report to me."

The gendarmes began their search, leaving the sub-prefect alone with the clerk. The former was beginning to repent of having compromised his dignity by this chase after a murderer, and as time slipped by, and the gendarmes failed to return, he became more and more uneasy and impatient.

The moon was setting, but the storm had ceased. The sky was cloudless, and the reflection from the fallen snow illumined the scene. The river, partially frozen, flowed along noiselessly between rows of pollards at the base of the height upon which Salviac has been built. Houses stand almost at the edge of the cliff; at one end rises the church spire, at the other the massive club-house; the market, town hall, sub-prefecture, court-house, and prison, those necessary adjuncts of civilization, being far back in the rear.

"The gendarmes don't return," said Vignory, stamping impatiently.

"They must still be searching," rejoined the clerk.

"The people up there must begin to be astonished at my prolonged absence," rejoined the sub-prefect. "I am not forced to make a policeman of myself; besides, I am anxious to attend the inquiry. So let us go back, my dear fellow—that is, unless you would prefer to await the sergeant's return."

"That is for you to decide, sir."

"Then, remain, and give him a description of the murderer. I caught only a hasty glimpse of him, but I can swear that he was tall, and that he wore a broad-brimmed hat. As for the weapon he used, I presume he has got rid of that by this time. It would be as well to search for it carefully among the bushes."

"Strange!" muttered the shrewd Mouleydier, suddenly. "At this hour of the night everybody in Salviac is generally asleep, and I notice two lighted windows up there, and they are the windows of the house which Louis Chancelade occupies with his sister."

"Louis Chancelade!" repeated the sub-prefect; "the schoolmaster I dismissed on my arrival at Salviac?"

"And the son of the Pierre Chancelade who headed the insurgents on the fourth of December, and who was despatched to Perigueux this evening, under escort."

"Ah, ha! This is a coincidence worthy of attention."

"The son is no better than the father. They are all born rebels. For more than sixty years this family has been contending against the government, no matter what the government might be."

"And the son could not forgive the commissary for transporting the old man. Only yesterday he came to protest against the decision, and expressed himself with so much violence that the commissary took him by the arm and put him out of the room. I was present."

"Yes, and last night, at the cafés, it was said that Louis Chancelade had sworn to have his revenge."

"In that case, my dear fellow, I know the culprit, and I am very anxious to retain the honour of arresting him. I will have you appointed chief tax-collector within a fortnight. But we mustn't lose a minute. While the judicial authorities are conducting the inquiry up there, we will visit the schoolmaster's abode. There will be five of us, counting the gendarmes, and that is certainly enough to arrest one man."

"He won't be captured without a struggle, and if he has kept his gun, it won't be easy to effect an entrance."

"If you are afraid, my dear fellow," said the sub-prefect, disdainfully, "I won't detain you. But I warn you that when a man fears death, he is likely to remain a clerk all his life."

"I only thought it best to warn you of the possible danger, sir. I am ready to start, and, if it should be necessary to make an attack upon the house, I ask a place in the foremost ranks."

"You display too much ardour now. That would be the business of the gendarmes. Let me give my instructions. Here they come.—Well, so you have found nothing?"

"Nothing, sir," said the sergeant. "I tried to follow the tracks the man left in the snow, but midway down the hill they ceased, and there was no means of discovering which way he had gone."

"I know. Do you see that light yonder?"

"Yes, in old Chancelade's house."

"What! does the house belong to him?"

"Yes, sir. Although he farmed for Count de Sigoulès, he owns some property—twenty acres or so—near Champagnac, and a house in town, which his children occupy."

"And they don't keep early hours, it seems. Which is the shortest way to their house?"

"Round by the church."

"Move on, then. I will follow you, and when we have reached it, I will tell you what to do."

The sergeant summoned his subordinates, and then started off at a rapid pace. Vignory allowed the gendarmes to get a little distance in advance, in order that he might be able to talk freely with his companion, who had risen very considerably in his estimation. "What kind of a man is this young Chancelade?" he asked. "I dismissed him, but you must know him better than I do."

"He doesn't pass for a bad fellow in Salviac, though he is rather proud and very reserved in his manner. He seems to think himself above the majority of people because he is a Bachelor of Letters. He took charge of a primary school from choice, as he is capable of filling a much higher position. He is a fanatic on political and social questions, and I think him capable of doing anything in defence of his opinions. It is in the blood. Old Chancelade is a fanatic of the deepest dye, as he proved."

"And the sister?"

"She is of the same stamp; but very charitable. She teaches girls to sew, takes care of foundling children, and works day and night for the poor. In short, she is a feminine St. Vincent de Paul, and a pretty one into the bargain."

"I have never seen her, or I should have noticed her, I'm sure. The ladies of Salviac are certainly not remarkable for their good looks."

"Oh, she goes out very little."

"Doesn't she go to church on Sunday?"

"I think so, and they say her brother scolds her for it, but she must go to early mass, at six o'clock."

"And I only go to late mass—to the lazy people's service—and I wish I could get out of that. But I am the sub-prefect, and if I failed to show myself, I should have all the religious people, and the government I represent, down upon me. I hope this sister won't put spokes in my wheels."



She must be very popular in the neighbourhood, and she will probably defend her rascally brother."

"No doubt; she is very fond of him, and considers him a wonderful man. She would be chopped in pieces rather than say a word that would injure him."

"We will dispense with her evidence, then. The main thing is to take them by surprise. She is, no doubt, sitting up for him, and we shall be on hand to receive him. Your plan is certainly a capital one, and if our expedition is as successful as I trust it will be, you won't find me ungrateful."

They had walked some distance by this time, and the gendarmes, who preceded them, were beginning to ascend the slope leading to the town. They finally reached the narrow, badly-paved, high street which runs through the locality, conducting past the club-house, to a charming but little frequented promenade; for the inhabitants prefer to saunter about the dingy little square in front of the town hall, rather than contemplate the charming valley of the Dronne from a shady esplanade. The tragical death of the commissary had not aroused the town's-folk from their usual torpor, for the sub-prefect and his party did not meet a living soul. At Salviac, all the cafés are closed at ten o'clock by order of the police, so their frequenters had long since been sound asleep; and the witnesses of the catastrophe had doubtless followed the corpse to the sub-prefecture, where the commissary had been staying. The silence and solitude admirably suited the plans of the ambitious sub-prefect, for he was anxious to out-strip the police in this chase for the murderer, and to bring them the culprit bound hand and foot, while they were still occupied with vague conjectures.

After proceeding a short distance up the street, the gendarmes turned to the left into a minor thoroughfare, near the end of which stood Chancelade's house. "There is no light to be seen on this side now," remarked Mouleydier.

"Of course not," replied his companion. "The wily school-master does not want any one to know of his return. He is perfectly well aware that his sister is waiting for him, and the light in the windows overlooking the river is a preconcerted signal between them."

"May I ask if you propose to arrest her as well?"

"No; certainly not. I have no desire to make myself unpopular. By and by, perhaps—I can't say. If it is proved that she is implicated in the crime, public opinion will change respecting her."

"Oh! I would willingly wager my right hand that Edmée knows nothing about the affair. Her brother—if he did commit the crime—took good care not to let her know his intentions."

"I quite agree with you, and I shall treat her with all the deference she deserves. Leave all this to me, my dear fellow; I know how to manage a woman," added Charles Vignory, stroking his moustache complacently.

The sergeant had stationed a man on either side of the front door, and now stood awaiting the orders of the sub-prefect, who asked, "Has the house any other outside door?"

"No, sir. There is a small garden in the rear that extends to the edge of the cliff, which at this point is about one hundred and fifty feet above the river. On the right there is the parsonage; on the left, the residence of Monsieur Braconne, the lawyer; but there is no means of communication between the three dwellings. The walls are at least two feet thick. Houses are not built in this fashion now-a-days."

The Chancelade house, covered with a thick growth of ivy, was indeed very old, and did not seem to have been repaired for a long time. It comprised a ground floor and first storey covered with a tiled roof in bad condition; the door seemed rickety, and the window shutters were worm eaten and weather stained. They were closed, and not a sound came from within. "Shall I knock?" asked the sergeant.

"No, I will do that," replied the sub-prefect. "Stand a little aside with your men. You, Mouleydier, had better place yourself behind me."

Having issued these orders, M. Vignory seized hold of the knocker—bells were as yet unknown in Salviac—and rapped vigorously.

A spell of silence followed, and then a feminine voice inquired: "Is it you, Louis?"

"You see she is expecting him," whispered Mouleydier. "He has not yet returned, and when he does, he will be caught like a rat in a trap."

The sub-prefect silenced the speaker with a gesture, and then replied in the affirmative, disguising his voice. He could not imitate Louis Chancelade's, however, but he endeavoured to reply in the most engaging tone possible. Still the door was not immediately opened. Mademoiselle Edmée was evidently in doubt, and to decide her, the ingenious Vignory hit upon the expedient of tapping the door hastily with his fingers, as much as if he had said, "I am afraid to speak loud. You know me. Don't keep me standing here. Some neighbour might come to his window."

It is true that the means was not such as an official mindful of his dignity would employ in such a case, but it proved successful. Louis Chancelade's sister set the door ajar. She had a candle in her hand, and as the light fell full upon Charles Vignory's face, she uttered a cry of surprise, and attempted to close the portal, but Vignory promptly availed himself of his opportunity, and entered the place. This advantage gained, he insured communication with his escort by placing his foot in such a way as to prevent Edmée from closing the door again, and then proceeded to remove his hat.

"Who are you?" inquired the young girl in a firm voice.

"I fancied I had the honour of being known to you, mademoiselle," replied Vignory in his sweetest tones. "I am the sub-prefect of Salviac."

The girl made a hasty movement that did not escape Vignory's lynx eyes, but she quickly recovered from her transient discomfiture, and coldly replied, "Very well, sir; what do you desire of me?"

"I wish to see your brother."

"My brother is not at home."

"May I venture to inquire when he will return?"

"He will not return."

"Indeed? I fancied you were waiting for him. Just now, when I rapped, you said: 'Is that you, Louis?'"

"I repeat, sir, that he will not return to-night. I am surprised that you, who dismissed him, should be so anxious to see him, particularly in the middle of the night." Just then, however, the girl saw the silver-braid on the hat of one of the gendarmes gleaming through the darkness. "Oh, I understand at last," she said, bitterly. "You have come to arrest him. It was not enough to send my father to the galleys, you must have my brother, too. Ah, well, arrest me. I am as guilty as he is; for his opinions are mine."

She looked superb in her anger and disdain, and Vignory could but admire her. Her large, dark eyes flashed dangerously; and her regular re-

finer features wore an expression of intense scorn. The sub-prefect was compelled to admit that he had never met a more beautiful woman, even in Paris. "Excuse me, mademoiselle," he said, forcing a smile, "you are not concerned in the matter; besides, I do not wage war upon the opinions of any one. The government I serve dismissed Monsieur Louis Chancelade, because he was waging open war against it; but if your brother had merely contented himself with supporting his republican opinions, I should not have come here to disturb you to-night."

"Of what do you accuse him, then?" cried Edmée Chancelade. "For asking his father's release of the heartless man who brutally repulsed him?"

"Mademoiselle," the sub-prefect replied, "a crime has been committed this evening, in the town, and I regret to say that suspicion has fallen upon your brother."

"That is absurd. My brother is not in Salviac."

"Indeed! Where is he, then?" And as Edmée bit her lips, but made no reply, Vignory added: "You refuse to tell me? You make a great mistake, mademoiselle. It would be of advantage to your brother to prove an *alibi*: besides, if he left town before nightfall, he can not be suspected of a crime committed merely half an hour ago. He was in Salviac at noon, for I met him in the street; but I am quite willing to believe that he left town afterwards, and I don't see why you should refuse to tell me where he is—that is, unless the journey upon which he so suddenly started had some guilty object."

"Question him on the subject. He will answer you."

"You see, mademoiselle, you are expecting him?" Edmée, again caught in a trap, cast down her eyes and made no reply. "That being the case, mademoiselle, you can hardly blame me for taking my precautions. Will you kindly show me into one of the rooms on the ground floor? The gendarmes I brought with me can remain here in the hall and open the door for your brother when he comes."

M. Mouleydier now slipped into the house, followed by the sergeant and his men, the last of whom closed the door behind him. Mademoiselle Chancelade, thus driven to the wall, surveyed them scornfully, but did not evince the slightest intention of complying with the sub-prefect's request. "I shall know to-morrow if there is still such a thing as justice in France," she said, haughtily; "for I hold you responsible for this unwarrantable intrusion, and shall certainly enter a complaint against you. As for compelling me to receive you elsewhere than in this hall, I defy you to do so."

"Heaven save me from resorting to violence, mademoiselle," cried M. Vignory, hypocritically. "We are very comfortable here, and here we will remain, if you prefer it. Indeed, if you desire to return to your own room, I shall offer no objection."

"I shall remain here. I intend to share my brother's fate. If you arrest him, you must arrest me, too, as I said before."

"I understand," replied the sub-prefect smiling. "When he raps you intend to call out to him, 'Run off, the gendarmes are here!'"

"You are very much mistaken, sir. My brother has a key. Besides, if I warned him of his danger, he would not fly. Only those who are guilty take flight without pausing to prove their innocence."

"Well, I trust that your brother will succeed in clearing himself."

"Of what do you accuse him?"

"I can tell you, now. The commissary-general has just been shot!"

"My father's executioner!"

"That exclamation alone would suffice to explain why suspicion has fallen upon your brother. He, like yourself, has always hated the official who only did his duty in punishing a dangerous rebel."

"True, we hate this man, and if Louis could have compelled him to fight, he would have taken pleasure in killing him, but Louis would not stoop to murder."

"I will believe that—until the contrary is proved. But it is unfortunate for him that he should have taken it into his head to leave home in such weather as this, and at an hour when all honest people are asleep."

"You seem to be out yourself."

"It is very different in my case. I witnessed the murder and started after the murderer whom I pursued as far as the river. There, Monsieur Mouleydier, who was with me, called my attention to the fact that there was a light in your windows."

"So it is to this gentleman that I am indebted for your visit," said the young girl, giving Mouleydier a look of scorn. "I should never have believed that a fellow townsman would have so degraded himself as to serve as your spy."

Martial hung his head under this rebuke, which deeply annoyed him, as for more than a year he had been unsuccessfully ogling the beautiful Edmée; it was hard to be thus humiliated by a girl whose affection he had hoped to win.

The gendarmes stood by looking on in amusement, but without saying a word, and the spell of silence which followed the discussion was suddenly broken by the grating of a key in the lock of the front door. Edmée Chancelade turned pale, but she gave no other sign of fear. She did not even extinguish the light she held, although such a proceeding might have considerably inconvenienced the persons waiting for her brother. They stepped back, however, so that on opening the door Louis only saw his sister. "It was a failure," he said to her, gloomily. "The cowards deserted me at the last moment, and unaided I was unable—"

He did not complete the sentence, for the sergeant seized hold of him from behind, and the gendarmes took advantage of his surprise to divest him of a double-barrelled gun which he carried on his shoulder. Before he had recovered from his astonishment, his arms were seized and handcuffs were slipped upon his wrists. "Very well; I surrender," he said, coldly, and turning to his sister, who stood silent and motionless, he added: "Fear nothing. They can put me in prison, but I defy them to find judges to convict me." Then, addressing the sub-prefect, he remarked: "You are appearing in a fine part, sir. It was probably this scoundrel here who denounced me."

Mouleydier, shrinking from the schoolmaster's glance, averted his face, and said nothing.

"Let us put an end to this," said Louis. "You have no intention of arresting my sister; so take me away."

M. Vignory gave a signal to the gendarmes, who stood round their prisoner. "Believe in my sincere regret," he remarked to Edmée. "I have been compelled to perform a very painful duty, but I deeply deplore your situation; and—"

"I can dispense with your pity," replied the girl, drily. And M. Vignory having turned away, she glanced at her brother and placed her finger on her lip, as much as to say: "Confess nothing. They know nothing."

Louis left the house with his head proudly erect, between the two gendarmes who walked on either side of him. The sergeant preceded him. The sub-prefect and Mouleydier followed, and Edmée closed the door after them without saying one word to her brother.

Vignory and young Mouleydier loitered in the rear of the gendarmes. "It was certainly he who fired the shot!" they both remarked, in the same breath.

"And the sister was in the secret," added the clerk, still smarting under the girl's stinging words.

"That is a question for the investigating magistrate. At all events I have the murderer, and those people up there will be surprised when we make our appearance with the culprit."

"Then you are not going to send Chancelade straight to prison?"

"No. I want to enjoy my triumph, and you shall have your share of it. We are going to the sub-prefecture, where I intend to bring this man face to face with Monsieur Santelli's corpse. I must give my instructions to the sergeant, however, or else he will conduct us straight to the house of detention."

And thereupon he quickened his pace in order to overtake the non-commissioned officer who was carrying the gun wrested from the prisoner. The latter walked on with a firm step; he was a stalwart fellow clad in the garb of a country sportsman: a jacket of thick brown cloth, corduroy breeches, leather gaiters, heavy shoes, and a broad-brimmed felt hat. The costume became him well, and he carried himself proudly, as if protesting against his arrest. As the sub-prefect passed him, he called to him and said: "Will you have the kindness to tell me of what I am accused?"

"You will learn presently," replied Vignory, without even turning, for he was looking forward to the sensational scene which he had planned. He then whispered a few words to the sergeant, who replied in subdued tones: "All right, sir, I understand. The body is in the best room at the sub-prefecture. It had just been taken there when I was ordered by the prosecutor's assessor to start for the river in search of the murderer. It was Chancelade who committed the crime, unquestionably. I have satisfied myself that his gun has just been fired. I dipped my finger into one barrel, and when I drew it out, it was black with powder."

"You can tell that to the prosecutor, my good fellow; and we shall see how the prisoner explains the fact."

Having spoken, M. Vignory allowed the gendarmes to pass on, and resumed his place beside Mouleydier.

A few minutes' walk along the high street and past the town hall brought them to some steps leading to an open space where they met a party of young fellows singing a republican song; with the refrain "Nations are our brothers and tyrants are our foes." They yelled out the latter words with an emphasis which seemed to indicate that the crime was already known in this part of the town. However, the prisoner and his escort passed on and reached the garden in front of the sub-prefecture, where they were met by the local commissary of police and the quartermaster of the gendarmes.

After a short conference, Louis Chancelade was left under the surveillance of the two gendarmes; while M. Vignory, Mouleydier, and the sergeant entered the building. The prisoner had lost none of his calmness; on the contrary, he seated himself quietly on the steps of the sub-prefecture like a man who feels the need of a rest, after a long walk. He had time to take one, for M. Vignory had to relate the particulars of the chase to the legal

authorities to explain the part that Mouleydier had taken in the expedition, and to advise them to wring a confession from the culprit by means of the emotion which he would necessarily feel on being brought unexpectedly into the presence of the man he had slain.

Nearly twenty minutes had elapsed when the sergeant reappeared, conducted the prisoner upstairs, opened a door and ushered him into a large room where the sub-prefect, the public prosecutor, and his assessor were seated round a table. Young Mouleydier had modestly ensconced himself in the embrasure of a window; and near a bed, the curtains of which were closely drawn, stood Dr. Thiviers, the oldest and most respected medical man in Salviac. This rather imposing array did not trouble Louis Chancelade, however. He knew all the parties present; the majestic-looking public prosecutor, and the weazle-featured assessor by sight, and the doctor by long acquaintance, for M. Thiviers had cured Edmée of typhoid fever. The investigating magistrate was absent, having gone to Bordeaux to confer with the officials about the case of Adhémar de Mussidan, whom the Government hesitated to send before a mixed commission. M. Bourdeille, the presiding judge, having no authority to prosecute, had prudently gone home.

"Sergeant, remove the prisoner's handcuffs," commanded the public prosecutor. And the order having been obeyed, he added, "Approach!" to Chancelade, who advanced, folded his arms upon his breast, and waited.

"I do not ask your name. I know it. You were formerly schoolmaster at Lesguillac, and you were recently dismissed on account of insubordination and a failure to fulfil your duties."

"No, sir. I was dismissed on account of my political opinions," replied Chancelade, coldly.

"The inspector reported last month that you had left Lesguillac without the permission of your superiors."

"I came to Salviac to try and see my father, who was under arrest, but this consolation was denied me."

"And you seized upon this pretext to absent yourself from the school intrusted to your charge."

"That is to say I absented myself every evening and returned by early dawn to Lesguillac, which I reached in time to perform my duties. I hoped to move the heart of the man upon whom my father's fate depended. After my dismissal I came to Salviac to reside with my sister. Yesterday I again entreated the commissary-general to grant me permission to visit the prison. In reply, he threatened to have me locked up, and dismissed me from his presence."

"In that case you doubtless feel a deep resentment against him."

"Something deeper than resentment—hatred!"

"You admit it?"

"Why not? If I ever have an opportunity for revenge, I shall avail myself of it."

"Let us proceed," said the magistrate, after exchanging a meaning glance with the sub-prefect. "You were arrested a few moments ago, just as you returned home. Where had you been?"

"Taking a walk."

"On a cold night like this, and with a gun on your shoulder? You won't tell that you had been out shooting."

"I have nothing whatever to say on the subject. I certainly have a right to go and come as I choose. It is no crime to go out in a snow storm."

"No, but a person usually has some object in view when he goes out. Had you been to Lesguillac?"

"Possibly. I am not obliged to give an account of my actions."

"At what time did you leave home?"

"I can not say precisely. I have no watch."

"So you positively refuse to tell me what you did during the time that elapsed between your departure and your return?"

"I will perhaps tell you, when you have explained why you are so anxious to know."

"I will explain matters then," replied the prosecutor, in a solemn tone. "Sergeant, conduct the prisoner to the bed."

"That is not necessary," replied Chancelade, coolly. "I can go very well by myself." And he walked forward until he reached the doctor, who seemed much more agitated than himself.

"Now, doctor," continued the prosecutor, "will you kindly draw back the bed-curtains?"

The doctor complied; and taking a lamp standing near by he held it in such a way as to throw the light full on the dead man's face. "The commissary! and dead!" exclaimed Chancelade. "So there is justice in Heaven, after all!"

The words which escaped him were not calculated to conciliate his judges, much less to change their opinion in regard to his guilt. Brought suddenly into the presence of the murdered man, this fanatic exclaimed: "So there is justice in Heaven after all!" which was equivalent to saying: "The deed was a righteous one!" He had given no start of astonishment; his eyes were dry. Instead of compassionating the fate of the unfortunate official, he seemed to rejoice at his death.

A murmur of indignation greeted his words. Even Dr. Thiviers, a worthy man, who had attended Edmée during grievous illness, made a gesture of disapproval; the sub-prefect raised his hands in holy horror, and the assessor shuddered, and averted his face. Still, in reality, Louis' language was not that of a guilty man. A murderer, in such a case, would have concealed his animosity, would have trembled and turned pale. Now Chancelade remained utterly unmoved. But magistrates, like the rest of mankind, are wont to be quickly impressed by an imprudent word, and their first impressions are not always correct. "This man was alive and well one short hour ago," said the public prosecutor. "He had restored peace to this district, disturbed by a wicked insurrection. You killed him for having done his duty, and even now you show no pity for his corpse. What sort of a man are you?"

"Did he show mercy to my father, this man whom you style a peace-maker, but who never showed mercy to any one?" replied Chancelade vehemently. "I don't know who killed him, but I am sure that it was somebody who had the loss of a near and dear one to avenge."

"Which was precisely the case with you."

"Yes; but if I had killed him, I should have done it in the streets of Salviac, and in broad daylight."

"How do you know that the crime was not committed under such circumstances?"

"Because I saw the commissary at five o'clock. He was entering the sub-prefecture. I don't suppose it was there that he was shot?"

"Then you were in the town at five o'clock?"

"Probably."

"And you were also here at eleven o'clock, hiding under the terrace beside the club-house. You no doubt knew that the commissary was going there—"

"How could I know it, pray?"

"Answer me, instead of constantly interrupting me. Monsieur Santelli entered the club-house at eleven o'clock with the sub-prefect. They approached the window. You fired, killed him with one shot, and then ran away."

"I deny it."

"I am aware of that. But tell me, on returning home, what route did you take?"

"I returned home by way of the high street, and I found the gendarmes already in my house, where they had been led, I presume, by the sub-prefect and that young coward who is hiding over yonder."

"Don't insult the witnesses, and don't hope to escape my questions by indulging in abuse. You do not usually wear your present costume. Why are you dressed in this fashion?"

"I have been seen a hundred times in the same clothes that I am now wearing. Indeed, I never wear any others when I go into the country."

"Was it with the intention of going into the country that you took a gun—the gun the sergeant seized?"

"No, it was to defend myself in case I happened to be attacked. The roads are not very safe since your commissary pacified the district."

"Your expectation of an attack must have been realized, for two shots have been recently fired from your gun. Both barrels are black with powder, the sergeant states."

"What does that prove? There are any number of wolves in the neighbourhood; and in the winter, and especially when snow is on the ground, they are always prowling around."

"You are not speaking seriously, I'm sure. You fired your gun at a man."

"Then I must have missed him with the first shot, since I was obliged to fire a second bullet, and you just told me that the commissary received but one wound."

This argument was unanswerable, and the public prosecutor being unprepared for it, he at first made no rejoinder. "Is there anything to prove that but one shot was fired?" he eventually asked, with a meaning look at the sub-prefect.

"I heard but one report," replied M. Vignory, "and if another bullet had been fired, it is probable that it would have hit me."

"The sergeant may be mistaken. The barrels of the gun must be examined by an expert," said the prosecutor, feeling himself worsted on this point. "Let us proceed."

"To what?" replied the prisoner, insolently. "I have told you all I have to tell you, and I shall say no more."

"Then your examination will end here for this evening, but it will be resumed to-morrow by the investigating magistrate; and in the meantime, I must consign you to prison. But before doing so, I must remind you that if you can prove an *alibi* this is the time to do so."

"I did so some time ago when I told you I was not in Salviac when the murder was committed."

"It is not enough for you merely to say so. You must prove the truth of your assertion, and that can certainly be no very difficult matter if you are telling the truth. Give us an account of the manner in which you spent your time this evening."

"I absolutely refuse to do so," replied Chancelade, after a short silence.



"Remember that this refusal compromises you."

"I admit it, but I have my reasons for remaining silent."

"Then you will be taken to prison without delay, and I warn you that you will not be allowed to communicate with anybody."

"I expected as much. You treated my father, who was no more guilty than I am, in the same manner. I am even ready to be transported without a trial. Send me into exile, if it pleases you. It matters very little to me. You can not prevent my sister from joining me. But let us put an end to all this. I am very tired. I should like to rest, and I shall sleep as soundly in prison as in my own bed at home." Then, turning to M. Thiviers, Louis added: "My dear doctor, do me the favour to draw the bed curtains. The sight of Monsieur Santelli's dead body has failed to produce the anticipated impression upon me, and these gentlemen, like myself, must think that this lugubrious farce has lasted long enough."

Dr. Thiviers mechanically obeyed. He was beginning to regain his wonted self-possession, and to hope that the brother of his great favourite, Mademoiselle Edmée, did not have an abominable crime upon his conscience.

"Sergeant," now said the public prosecutor, "take two of your men, and conduct the prisoner to prison. Here is a warrant." Then, turning to his assessor, he added: "Monsieur Bizouin, will you be so kind as to accompany the sergeant, and to see that the prisoner is placed in a cell by himself, and allowed no intercourse with the other prisoners until further orders? When this is done, bring the superintendent to me. I wish to give him some instructions personally."

"By all means advise him to lock me in securely," sneered Chancelade. "I intend to escape at the first opportunity, for I don't much rely upon your justice."

The prosecutor smiled scornfully, and said to Mouleydier, who was beginning to feel uncomfortable: "I will detain you no longer, sir. We shall soon require your testimony, but you can now retire."

"Let him pass out in advance of me, then," exclaimed the prisoner. "I won't descend the stairs side by side with the cowardly informer who caused my arrest."

No urging was required to induce Mouleydier to hasten his departure; and a moment afterwards, Chancelade went off without a word. He retired, however, with the honours of war. The public prosecutor and the sub-prefect looked rather crest-fallen, while the doctor was not at all sorry that Chancelade had defended himself so ably. "That man is an audacious rascal!" remarked the prosecutor, who could not forgive the ex-school-master for his arrogant manner.

"Audacious and shrewd as well," replied M. Vignory, annoyed that the carefully planned confrontation had proved a failure. "I am satisfied that only one shot was fired from the terrace, and if his gun was really fired twice—"

"That remains to be proved. I sha'n't be content with a cursory examination."

"Allow me to add, gentlemen," interposed the doctor, "that the wound does not seem to have been made by an ordinary rifle. I am satisfied that the necropsy will furnish proof of that."

"And I am satisfied that the investigation will explain everything. Besides, there are plenty of moral proofs. Chancelade had sworn to avenge his father."

"But he isn't the only person who hated the commissary," urged the

doctor. "The Baron de Mussidan not only insulted him in the grossest manner, but threatened him."

"That is true," admitted the sub-prefect. "I myself heard his threats. However, he is safe under lock and key. I hope we shall soon get him off our hands, as he is a very dangerous prisoner. One of these days, if we don't keep an eye on him, he will be setting fire to the prison. And now, my dear prosecutor, I will leave you to give your orders to the superintendent of the prison, and turn my own attention to my correspondence. I must send a special messenger to the prefect to-night. By the way, I sha'n't neglect in my report to do justice to the zeal and intelligence which you have displayed on this lamentable occasion."

With these words Vignory stalked majestically out of the room, but when he had gained the privacy of his own apartments he rubbed his hands complacently, and said to himself: "A good beginning, truly! The fellows at the Ministry of the Interior will cease to think now that men of fashion are good for nothing, and I shall obtain promotion."

He little foresaw the crushing blow that was in store for him.

## II.

THE Parisian prisons are certainly perfect; but the provincial ones, often located in old castles and convents, have very defective arrangements, and are at times in a bad state of repair. The prison of Salviac was of this kind, being an old Ursuline nunnery acquired as national property during the first revolution; however, the nunnery buildings were large, and as they were three in number, one of them served as a sub-prefecture, the second as a law-court, and the third as a house of detention.

Prior to the *coup d'état*, the post of chief-warder had been a sinecure, and the old trooper who filled it had lived almost on fraternal terms with the poor devils he guarded—peasants imprisoned for poaching and petty thefts, and drunkards sentenced to a few days' detention for making a disturbance at night-time or fighting in the streets. However, after the December insurrection, a great change took place, for over forty prisoners had to be provided for, and strict surveillance became an imperative necessity. The nuns' large dining-room was transformed into a dormitory for the less important culprits, the ring-leaders were confined in separate cells, while the apartments once occupied by the lady superior became those of a new chief-warder, who had been sent straight from Paris after serving an apprenticeship in the prisons there. He was, moreover, an old soldier. His name was Marteau; he was about fifty years of age, and though he had never risen above the rank of sergeant-major, he had behaved very bravely during ten campaigns in Algeria. If he had failed to receive the cross of the Legion of Honour, it was because he was not liked by his superiors on account of his disposition. Not that he was insubordinate; on the contrary, his love of discipline verged upon fanaticism. But he was harsh to his inferiors, sarcastic with his equals, and surly to everybody. The man was a born jailer, and had finally become one, thanks to the influence of a general who had taken such an interest in his welfare that he had arranged an advantageous matrimonial alliance for him. Pierre Marteau, middle-aged, poor, and unprepossessing in every respect, was married in 1849 to a charming young person of twenty-nine, remarkably pretty, graceful, well-bred and accomplished, and possessing a nice little dowry of thirty thousand francs.

Mademoiselle Aurélie de Saint-Amour, the orphan daughter of a captain in the army who had died penniless, had been at first reduced to giving lessons on the piano, and to accepting the position of governess in the family of the sister of Pierre Marteau's protector. Growing tired of the spinster life to which her poverty condemned her, she had finally followed the advice of the general, who urged her to marry a man who, although by no means attractive in manners or person, possessed sterling merits, and was sure of rapid advancement in his new calling. Aurélie resigned herself to her fate, and when a distant relative left her a nice little legacy about a month before the wedding, she evinced no desire to break her plighted troth.

Strange to say, the marriage had been a tolerably happy one. Marteau was not very amiable, and his manners sadly lacked distinction, but he adored his wife, and what is more, he respected her, and trusted her implicitly.

For some time after their marriage, the pair resided on a pleasant flat on the Isle Saint Louis, in Paris, Madame Marteau remaining mostly alone, as her husband was employed at the Conciergerie prison near by. She did not complain of her lot, though she was very anxious for her husband's advancement, and shortly after the *coup d'état*, Marteau's protector, General de Plancoët, who was devoted to Louis Napoleon, took advantage of the opportunity to further his *protégé's* interests. The government needed a trusty man to guard the insurgents of the Dordogne, temporarily confined at the prison of Salviac; and Pierre Marteau was appointed to the post with the promise of soon receiving a better one. His wife at first evinced some slight unwillingness to follow him, but finally consented, on condition that she should be allowed to pay occasional visits to Paris if their exile proved of long duration.

Pierre started the first, to take possession of his post and also to prepare suitable quarters for his dear Aurélie. In less than a week the four rooms assigned to the new chief-warder had been cleansed, freshly painted and papered. The furniture arrived from Paris a few days later—furniture more luxurious than the wealthiest citizens of Salviac possessed—including a superb Erard piano, the general's wedding-gift. Thus on the morrow of New-year's day, when Madame Marteau arrived with her trunks, she was able to comfortably install herself in her new home. The sensation produced by her arrival was wonderful, the amazed idlers who witnessed it counted five immense trunks, and loudly praised her beauty and elegance. By night, everybody was talking about the jailer's pretty wife, a nickname that afterwards clung to her.

She was shrewd enough not to pay any visits. A jailer does not move in society: she would have been coldly received, and she was too proud to expose herself to slights. A few officials called to see her—those who were unmarried—and among them the sub-prefect; but she received them with great reserve, like a woman who realizes the inferiority of her position, and she at once declined the sub-prefect's proposal to come and practise duets with her. To tell the truth, Vignory, despite his Parisian stylishness, failed to impress her favourably. She went out but seldom, and then she was only met on the promenade, leaning on her husband's arm, or else at mass on Sundays. She confined herself in her apartments of her own free will, and seemed to enjoy herself there, though they were far from cheerful. It is true that some of her windows looked out upon open fields, but the others faced a courtyard, and surely nothing could be less cheerful than to see the poor prisoners wandering gloomily about.

By way of recreation, Aurélie spent most of her time in playing the piano, and as she was a capital performer she charmed the ears of the prisoners. Strains of the sweetest melody constantly pervaded the place, and Southerners are never insensible to the charms of music. The ballet air in "William Tell": "Thou, whom the bird could ne'er o'ertake," was a particular favourite with her, and every day while her husband was engaged in his duties, this familiar melody was wafted to the prisoners' cells.

Whenever Aurélie wished to go out, she was not obliged to pass through the record office of the prison, or to mix with her husband's subordinates. Her quarters had a separate staircase leading to a private door, which opened on to a patch of waste ground between the prison and the court-house. She seldom saw her husband except at meal-times, for he occupied a separate sleeping apartment, fearing to disturb his wife when he made his night rounds; which by an excess of zeal were extremely frequent.

Now, on the night of Louis Chancelade's arrest, the chief-warder did not go to bed at all, and at noon on the following day, his wife, who generally slept late, had not yet seen him. He made his appearance, however, for the one o'clock dinner, the fashion of Salviac, and by his unusually thoughtful manner his wife divined that something important must have happened since the previous evening. "What is the matter, my dear?" she asked him, affectionately.

"My burden of responsibility becomes heavier from day to day," replied Marteau, sulkily. "I already had that pretty fellow, the Baron de Mussidan, the most dangerous man in the country, on my hands; and now, I am charged with guarding the murderer of the commissary-general."

"Monsieur Santelli!" exclaimed Madame Marteau. "The gentleman who visited the prison yesterday! What? He has been killed?"

"Yes. Shot dead at the club-house. The murderer was hidden on the terrace."

"And he was captured?"

"Yes, almost immediately. The sub-prefect caught him, I believe. He was brought to the prison about midnight, and I had no end of trouble in finding a separate cell for him. Indeed, I was up until daybreak, and when I did go to bed, I could not close my eyes. I am positively worn out, and nearly starving."

"Dinner is ready, my dear. Who is the wretch?"

"A dismissed schoolmaster named Louis Chancelade."

"The brother of the girl I sometimes meet in the street? She is very pretty, and the brother isn't a bad-looking fellow."

"Yes, he would have made a good cuirassier. But as it is he will soon be guillotined. The authorities want to make an example of him, and they are right."

"Are they sure that this young man is really guilty?"

"It runs in the blood. His father, who has been imprisoned here for six weeks, was forwarded to Toulon last night, on his way to Cayenne."

"What! the old man who occupied the cell at the end of the courtyard?"

"Yes; and I locked the son up in the same cell for want of another one, and I begin to repent of it already, for the public prosecutor ordered me to keep him in close confinement; and from the cell he now occupies he can exchange signs with that Mussidan who is the leader of them all."

"But, my dear, their windows are barred so closely that even from my room I can scarcely distinguish the baron's features,

"Still, you can see him. These grated windows do not answer the purpose. I shall have them walled up."

"That will be hard, indeed, on the poor wretches."

"You need not pity them. If they had succeeded here, and in Paris, we should now be where they are. Come, let us eat our dinner."

Aurélié went with her husband into the dining-room where the soup was smoking upon the table, but she did not seem partial to the cookery, excellent as it was. She seemed to be reflecting, while Pierre Marteau ate like an ogre, so that but few remarks were exchanged during the repast. Towards the end of the meal, however, Aurélié gently said: "My dear, it seems to me that it would be the right thing for me to go and give Made-moiselle Chancelade some news of her brother, and to try to console her."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed the chief-warder. "Do you want to ruin me? I wasn't sent here to keep up an acquaintance with the prisoners' families."

"Of course not; but I'm not an official. Besides, the government ought not to show unnecessary severity. At least, such is the opinion of General de Plancoët, who wrote you to that effect only a few days ago."

"That is to say he urged me to show all possible favour to Mussidan."

"Yes, because the baron has warm defenders among the prince-president's friends, so that it is quite possible he will be released after two or three months' imprisonment."

"While they will transport the poor peasants he incited to rebellion. However, that's their own business; and I have no desire to persecute this baron although he sings forbidden songs all day long, and plays an accordion which I was fool enough to let him have. I allow him to have his meals sent to him from outside, and he abuses the privilege by throwing slices of meat pie to the prisoners he sees walking about the yard."

"You forget that the prisoners are friends of his."

"Pretty friends for a nobleman to have—farm-hands and vagabonds! And to cap the climax, he gets drunk every night on champagne."

"Are you sure?" asked Aurélié, quietly.

"Yes, his cousin, the Count de Sigoulès, sent him a hamper of it, with truffles and other dainties."

"Oh, well, who can tell? The wind may change, and if Monsieur de Mussidan's party should ever come into power, the baron may be of service to us."

"I don't think it worth while to count upon that. One thing is certain, Chancelade will never do us any good. He will end his days on the guillotine, and as for his sister, she's a rabid republican, and that is reason enough for you to keep away from her."

"I have no idea of becoming intimate with her, but I think that the step I spoke of would be approved of by the people of Salviac."

"Well, do as you please," growled Pierre, after a moment's silence, "that is, providing you say nothing more to me about it. I know my duty, and I shall do it. I must now go and see the public prosecutor, who wants to know how Chancelade has behaved since he was locked up. And the quartermaster of gendarmes has also sent word that he wants to speak to me so it will probably be five o'clock before I get back. Good-bye; give me a kiss before I go."

Aurélié did as her husband requested, but as soon as he had left her, she returned to her little drawing-room, and opened the window, though the weather was very cold. The court-yard was deserted; it was not the

hour for the prisoners' promenade, as Madame Marteau knew perfectly well. Opposite her, on the other side of the yard, there stood the wing reserved for the prisoners who occupied separate cells. The gloomy wall was pierced with three heavily barred windows, that of the cell occupied by Adh  mar de Mussidan being exactly opposite the jailer's sitting-room. On the right hand, in another wing of the building, Louis Chancelade, at that moment fast asleep, was in close confinement.

Aur  lie, after a short stay at the window, seated herself at her piano, and began to play her favourite air from "William Tell," with great spirit. Before it was ended, some one began playing upon an accordion, the air, "Vive Henri IV.," and a manly form appeared at the window opposite.

Madame Marteau sprang up, and without advancing to the window, threw a kiss to her neighbour, the Baron de Mussidan, who returned the salute with enthusiasm. Just then, a ray of bright sunlight shone full upon the face of the young nobleman, who was certainly a handsome cavalier. He was as tall as Louis Chancelade, but more slender, and had the fair complexion and hair of an English nobleman. He wore a long silky moustache, and his large blue eyes could not merely win a woman's heart, but face danger unflinchingly. They were beautiful eyes, as changeful as the sea; now soft and tender, now haughty and flashing. Moreover, the baron had a finely cut mouth with perfect teeth; and a truly aristocratic nose.

After the exchange of salutes, a spirited pantomime began, which an onlooker might have failed to understand, but which was perfectly intelligible to Adh  mar and Aur  lie. A gesture from the latter informed the baron that there was a new prisoner; another, indicated the window of the cell occupied by Louis Chancelade; whereupon Adh  mar made a questioning movement of the head, signifying: "Will you?" an affirmative reply being followed by a deal of secret telegraphing, during which Aur  lie counted twelve upon her fingers.

That was all. They understood each other, and the baron left the window. Aur  lie noiselessly closed hers, passed into her bedroom, and put on a bonnet, supplied by a Paris milliner, and a beautiful velvet mantle, calculated to excite the envy of the Salviac ladies.

She leisurely descended the staircase, opened the private door of which she alone had the key, carefully relocked it, and proceeded along a passage to an open space in front of the hostelry frequented by the country gentry of the neighbourhood. Old Count de Sigoul  s chanced, at that very moment, to be standing at the door-way of the inn, watching the stable-boy harness his horse properly to the tilbury which was to take him back home. The count had been quite a Don Juan under the Restoration, and even now, he never let a pretty woman pass him without examining her with a critical eye. As it happened, whilst Aur  lie approached on the one side, Edm  e Chancelade advanced from the opposite direction, and the two beauties of Salviac were thus doomed to meet under the admiring eyes of the gallant nobleman.

Edm  e and Aur  lie were utterly unlike in appearance. The former, a brunette, tall, pale, and slight, strongly resembled one of those somewhat delicate but stately virgins, which German artists of the fifteen century were so fond of portraying. She advanced slowly, with downcast eyes, and her arms folded under the heavy woollen cloak which the peasant women of Perigord wear in winter; and the perfect simplicity of her bearing and attire, suited her style of beauty admirably. Aur  lie, on the contrary, was a perfect blonde, her hair was the colour of ripe wheat, her

blue eyes sparkled with mischief and coquetry, and as she tripped lightly along, her tiny feet scarcely touched the rough slushy pavement.

The Count de Sigoulès had recognised the daughter of his former tenant Chancelade, in the distance, and not wishing to miss such a good opportunity to give her a public mark of sympathy, he advanced to meet her, and made ready to bow to her, hat in hand, with all the traditional gallantry of the French nobility. However, Madame Martean walked faster and passed him. Edmée, who knew her by sight, frowned slightly, and made a hasty movement, as if anxious to retreat and avoid her, but almost at the same instant she perceived M. de Sigoulès advancing to speak to her, and so she abandoned the attempt. Aurélie was not easily disconcerted; besides, she knew the count by sight, as he had made a vain attempt to see old Chancelade in prison, and she was not sorry to have an opportunity of making the acquaintance of the greatest aristocrat of Salviac. As she had remarked to her husband, she was anxious to win friends in all parties.

"What do you desire of me?" asked Edmée drily, having failed to avoid the jailer's wife.

"I wish to give you some news of your brother, mademoiselle," replied Aurélie, with superb assurance. "I was on my way to your house, and I am delighted to meet you here, for you would, perhaps, have refused to see me."

"There is not the slightest doubt of that, madame."

"Yes, I understand you distrust me on account of my husband's position. But allow me to assure you that my sympathies are with the prisoners he guards. He only does his duty in carrying out the orders he receives; but I receive none, and I do mine, in trying to alleviate the hardships and sufferings of those who are unfortunate."

This was said in such a tone of sincerity that Mademoiselle Chancelade was touched, and M. de Sigoulès surveyed the jailer's pretty wife with interest. He had joined the two young women, and was so surprised to hear such sentiments proceed from Madame Martean's cherry lips, that he forgot to say a word to Edmée. "Have I not a right to assist the unfortunate, Monsieur le Comte?" continued Aurélie, in her sweetest tone.

"You know me?" exclaimed the nobleman, astonished to hear her address him by his title.

"Who doesn't know the Count de Sigoulès? I saw you, for the first time, the other day when my husband was under the painful necessity of refusing you admission to the prison, but I have often heard you named in Paris."

"By whom, pray?"

"By a friend of my poor father's—the General Marquis de Plancoët."

"Plancoët; ah, yes, I knew him well, years ago. We served together in the King's Guard. But that was long ago, and we have followed such different paths since then that I fancied he had forgotten me."

"Oh, he hasn't forgotten you, for when he secured my husband his appointment at Salviac, he spoke of giving me a letter of introduction to you, but refrained from doing so, because he thought that under the present circumstances—"

"It would place me in an embarrassing position. He was right. He and I are not in the same boat. However, ladies have nothing to do with politics, and I am really grateful to you for your interest in Edmée's brother. I don't share the opinions of Monsieur Chancelade, the elder, but he is a worthy man who has been obliged to pay dearly for an act of

imprudence, and as you are on such friendly terms with Plancoët, you might beg him to intercede for him."

"My influence with the general isn't as great as you suppose, Monsieur le Comte," replied Aurélie, smiling, "and if I ventured to intercede for anyone, it would rather be for Monsieur Louis Chancelade, who is so unjustly accused of a terrible crime."

"Unjustly, yes, madame," said Edmée, earnestly. "My brother is not a coward. He would not stoop to murder. If he be convicted, his judges will be the murderers."

"They won't find judges willing to condemn him to death," replied M. de Sigoulès. "I defy them to do so. But they will send him to Cayenne, as they have done with his father. How is he treated in prison?"

"By the prosecutor's orders he isn't allowed to communicate with anyone," replied Madame Marteau. "And I only wish I could have these orders annulled."

"You wouldn't succeed in moving the prosecutor, and if the orders were not carried out, it would cost your husband his place. Our friend, Plancoët, would then be obliged to find him another," said the old nobleman, with a tinge of irony in his tone. Aurélie coloured slightly, but showed no sign of anger at the covert sarcasm. "However, as you seem so kindly disposed, madame," continued M. de Sigoulès, "perhaps you will give me some news of my cousin, Adhémar de Mussidan. He is not under the ban, as we are allowed to write to him, though our letters are read, of course; still I am not allowed to see him, and the deuce take me if I know why. However, in his last letter he begged of me to cease my attempts to secure his release, and, upon my word, I begin to think that he finds his present quarters to his taste."

"I doubt that," was the smiling reply, "but he devotes most of his time to music."

"That explains why he sent for an accordion. I had no idea that he fancied that ridiculous instrument. You will say, perhaps, that any diversion is welcome when a person is under lock and key. Pellisson amused himself by taming spiders."

"Excuse me, sir," said Edmée, gently, "but I cannot linger here. My brother has no linen with him except what he was wearing at the time of his arrest. I am going to ask permission to send him what is absolutely needful, and I suppose the officials won't refuse my request."

"If you don't obtain the desired permission, I will find means of letting him have all you desire," interposed Aurélie, eagerly.

"That's right!" exclaimed M. de Sigoulès. "Besides, beauty and goodness always go together."

"I thank you, madame," said Mademoiselle Chancelade, coldly. "I trust that I shall not be obliged to avail myself of your generous offer, but I am very grateful for it. I thank you too, sir, for not abandoning Louis. You were unable to save our father, but you will perhaps be able to save my brother." Thereupon she passed on, proudly and calmly, directing her steps towards the old building which the inhabitants of Salviac called the Palace of Justice.

"A worthy girl!" murmured the count, watching her, as she moved away. He soon recollected, however, that another fair woman was present; and being a thoroughly well-bred man, he could not refrain from complimenting her on her kind intentions. Besides, it did not cost him any effort to be polite to such a charming person. He had been a great woman-killer



in earlier years, and despite his age, he was extremely partial to the fair sex. "Upon my word, madame," he began, "I feel very grateful to you, not only for the interest you take in that poor girl, but because you have made me twenty years younger. Had I been fortunate enough to meet you when I was in the guards, I positively believe I should have courted you. When I talk to you, it seems to me I am young again, but unfortunately, we are in Salviac—"

"And I am the wife of the chief-warder. However, I expect to go to Paris soon, and I hope that my husband will be promoted."

"No doubt he will!" said Sigoulès, somewhat impertinently. "But what is all this?" he added, glancing towards the street at the other end of the square. "It seems to me I hear the bells of a post-chaise."

Madame Marteau listened, and heard a rumble of carriage wheels accompanied by a tinkling of bells, and the loud cracking of a whip. Such an event was of rare occurrence in Salviac, and the shop-keepers, attracted by the sound, hurried to their doors to witness the arrival of the vehicle. However, this diversion far from pleased the charming Aurélie, who thought that the count's abrupt way of changing the conversation was scarcely polite, and wished to make him feel it. "Monsieur le Comte," she said, in a slightly piqued tone, "you remind me that a public square is not a drawing-room, and that our conversation has lasted too long already. I started out for the purpose of calling on Mademoiselle Chancelade. I have just met her, and offered her my services, and now it might excite remark if people saw me talking any longer with you. Allow me, therefore, to return home, and rest assured that I feel deeply indebted to you. You haven't been afraid to speak to the jailer's wife in the street, and whatever service I may be able to render the two prisoners in whom you take an interest, I shall never be able to repay my debt of gratitude to you." Then, without giving the count time to articulate a single gallant word, she returned towards the prison by a street which skirted the garden of the sub-prefecture.

The old nobleman on his side turned towards his tilbury and was about to get into it when the vehicle he had heard in the distance drove up. It was a rather shabby brougham, covered with mud, and drawn by four old horses, two of which were ridden by postillions. Such an equipage had never appeared in the streets of Salviac before; the people rushed to their windows, while the landlord of the inn darted out to receive the distinguished customer seemingly in store for him.

"I'll bet a hundred francs that it is a new commissary," growled M. de Sigoulès. "They lose no time in Paris. One man is no sooner killed than they dispatch another, who will probably meet with the same fate as his predecessor. It remains to be seen which will get tired first, the government, or the people of Salviac."

"Take care, now!" cried one of the postillions as he dashed round the corner of the square.

The count barely had time to give a hasty glance at the vehicle as it flew by. "Ah, ha! I was mistaken," he muttered. "It is not a commissary, but a lady. I wonder if they are going to try female inspectors now? At all events she doesn't mean to alight at the inn, for the carriage has turned into the street leading to the sub-prefecture. How strange! I never heard that Vignory was a married man. This new comer must be some government emissary in petticoats—a spy. I didn't have time to see her face, but I'll bet my right hand that she is as ugly as sin."

While the old nobleman cast another glance at his tilbury to see if all was right, the brougham was swiftly approaching the sub-prefecture, and Madame Marteau, who had preceded it up the same street, was soon overtaken and compelled to step on one side to avoid being run over. No less astonished than M. de Sigoulès at the unexpected appearance of such a vehicle in Salviac, she glanced at its occupant, who happened to be looking out of the carriage window. Two exclamations of surprise resounded at the same instant. "Aurélié!"—"Coralie!"

The postillions reined up their horses at the first word. They suspected that these ladies had something to say to each other; besides, the horses were glad of an opportunity to rest a moment, as the incline was very steep. "What are you doing here, now?" said the occupant of the carriage. "Do you know I have come to see Lolo?"

"Why, who is Lolo?" asked Aurélié.

"True! I hadn't made his acquaintance when you ceased visiting me. Lolo is Charlie—Charles Vignory."

"The sub-prefect?" cried Madame Marteau.

"A funny sub-prefect he must be. But how does it happen that you are here in this wilderness; are you still living with your husband?"

"Yes."

"But how about the general, then? Have you fallen out?"

"It was he who sent us to Salviac. He obtained an appointment here for my husband. Not one that I like, but I hope we shall soon be more pleasantly situated. But how long do you expect to remain here?"

"A week, possibly a fortnight, until my Muscovite returns from Saint Petersburg, for I have made a new conquest, my dear, a Russian prince who is very like a bear, but who cares no more for money than he does for water. He has gone home to sell a few hundred serfs to raise the coin to spend a few months pleasantly in France, and in the meantime, as I am as free as air, I said to myself: I'll pay my old friend Charlie a flying visit. He hasn't a penny left, but he is such a nice fellow and so amusing! I never heard any one mimic Grassot of the Palais Royal as well as he can. He'll be glad to see me, and we shall have some fun."

"Did you inform him of your intentions?"

"No, indeed, I wanted to give him a pleasant surprise."

"Then he isn't expecting you?"

"No, and I want to see how he'll look when he first catches sight of me."

"I shouldn't be particularly anxious if I were in your place. The people down here are the greatest set of prudes imaginable. By to-morrow everybody will have heard of your arrival at the sub-prefecture."

"Well, what of it? They will think that Charlie is married."

"No, they are not so stupid as you imagine, and I warn you, that you will ruin Monsieur Vignory."

"I shall be very sorry to do that. But I can't very well tell the postillions to take me back to Paris. Ah! an idea occurs to me. I will pass myself off as your sister."

"My husband knows that I haven't any sister, and he doesn't understand a joke."

"Then I will say that I am Vignory's cousin. Oh, I will arrange matters, never fear. I shall see you often, I hope."

"I fear that will be impossible."

"Oh, no, it won't. But we must not tarry here any longer. We shall excite remark. By-bye, my dear. Drive on, postillions."

The carriage rumbled on, and Madame Marteau hastened away to escape the people who had been watching the interview from a distance. While she was returning home by the longest route, greatly preoccupied, and by no means pleased at this unexpected meeting, Coralie alighted at the door of the sub-prefecture, paid the postillions and dismissed them with a majestic gesture, after telling the doorkeeper, who was gaping with astonishment, to take her bag and wraps from the carriage. "Is Monsieur Vignory at home?" she asked.

"Yes, madame," stammered the old fellow. "The sub-prefect is at work in his private room, but he can't see any one."

"He will see me. Where is his room?"

"On the floor above, madame, but—"

"Very good, very good! I can find my way without assistance."

And without paying the slightest attention to the worthy fellow's protests, Coralie flew up the steps. "Private Office of the sub-prefect," she read upon a door. "How fine it must be to sit enthroned in there. Charlie must really be a clever fellow to have secured such a good berth at once."

She cautiously opened the door, and saw Vignory sitting at a desk, with his back turned towards her; he was laboriously composing his report to the minister respecting the murder of the commissary, and was so deeply engrossed that he did not notice the opening and closing of the door. His visitor at once stole up behind him on tiptoe, placed her hands over his eyes, and cried out: "Cuckoo! guess who it is."

Vignory, furiously angry, tried to turn. Fully impressed with a sense of the dignity of his office, he knew no one in the district capable of indulging in such a joke. However, Coralie would not let go her hold; without taking her hands from his eyes, she burst into a hearty laugh, and exclaimed: "Come, don't get angry, but guess who it is."

Vignory, instead of replying, angrily shook himself free, rose up, and remained quite stupefied, on beholding his visitor. "Coralie!" he gasped at last.

"Yes, my dear fellow, Coralie who has not forgotten her old friend, but has come to cheer him in his exile at the cost of no little suffering and fatigue to herself. Ah! you may indeed be proud of my devotion."

Then, seeing him still stand there, the picture of dismay and consternation, she added:

"So this is my reception! A cool one, upon my word! Ah! I see, you are afraid of compromising yourself. Why, you great simpleton, there is nobody here!"

Vignory could resist the temptation no longer. He forgot that he was a sub-prefect, and kissed his pretty visitor with genuine zest. "I am glad to see you looking and acting like yourself again," she exclaimed. "If you had stood there glaring at me much longer, I should have gone straight back to Paris." Then, as Vignory left her to go and lock the door, she added: "So you are afraid some one may come in and find me here—but you liked to be seen with me formerly. To think that six weeks could make such a change in a man!"

"Your visit will create a great deal of unpleasant gossip here," said Vignory. "My superiors will hear of it to-morrow, and next week I shall be dismissed. Whom did you see on your arrival?"

"Only an old idiot in a queer sort of livery who tried to prevent me from coming up-stairs. He seemed awfully shocked. However he was an honest-

looking fellow, and so I entrusted my jewel-case to him. It will be quite safe, I suppose. That was all I brought with me, my trunks will come with the coach."

"Addressed to me, no doubt," plaintively murmured Vignory, who was beginning to lose his head.

"I could not very well send them to the priest of Salviac."

"Then I know what is in store for me. In less than a week I shall have lost my position, and be back in the streets of Paris."

"Where, between ourselves, you would have done much better to remain."

"Without funds."

"Oh, I had forgotten that. Have you really spent all your money?"

"To the very last centime, and I'm twenty thousand francs in debt besides. You can imagine how delightful Parisian life would be under such circumstances!"

"Anything would be better than living in this hole; but as you seem anxious to retain your office, I should be very sorry to be the cause of your losing it. Shall I return by post as I came?"

"You came down by post?"

"Of course. I drove straight here!"

"That caps the climax! You must have crossed the square in front of the inn where all the loafers of Salviac congregate. Everybody must have seen you."

"I only noticed a tall, old man, with a grey moustache who was standing near a tilbury. We very nearly ran over him as we passed, but he did not swear, he only stared at me."

"It must have been the Count de Sigoulès—a political enemy. This is the last straw."

"So you have political enemies, now," said Coralie, repressing a strong desire to laugh.

"Oh, you are just the same!" retorted Vignory, angrily. "It is strange that you can never be serious. Just because you have seen me indulge in a few escapades, you think I am a mere good-for-nothing. I have manœuvred very cleverly, since I have been here, I have made myself quite popular, and I was in a fair way to secure a much better appointment; but it is no use thinking of all that now."

"Why not? Merely because I have come down to see you? All right. I had better go back to Paris this evening."

"Your departure would do no good now. Everybody has heard of your arrival by this time."

"What am I to do then?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I am afraid there is nothing left for me but to pack my trunks, and prepare to receive my successor. It is a pity, too, just as I thought I was in luck. The rebels shot the commissary-general last night, and I had a very narrow escape as I was standing beside him at the time. I thought I was sure of the cross, at least."

"And if you don't get it, it will be my fault. Aurélie was right; I made a great mistake in coming here."

"Aurélie? Who is Aurélie?"

"True! I did not tell you. Why, just as my carriage was ascending the hill, I put my head out of the window, and who should I see but an old acquaintance. We knew each other when we were about twenty years

old, and we came out in the world together, so to say. She was a graduate of Saint Denis. I wasn't; and I went on the stage, as you know. However, she was no richer than I was—not as well off, in fact, for she was giving piano lessons at a franc an hour. But she was very pretty, and as sharp as steel; so she soon succeeded in securing a position as governess in a wealthy family, where she made the acquaintance of a general who took a great fancy to her, gave her a lot of money, and finally married her to a man he protected."

"All this is very interesting," said Vignory, impatiently, "but how does she happen to be in Salviac?"

"She is here with her husband who holds office here. You must know him, as all the public functionaries are under your control."

"What is his name?"

"I have forgotten. Besides, I never knew, and I quite forgot to ask Aurélie to-day."

"Aurélié?" rejoined the sub-prefect, who had a vague recollection of having heard the name before.

"Aurélié de Saint-Amour. Her father was of noble descent, but her husband can't be much of an aristocrat."

"What kind of a person is this old acquaintance of yours?"

"A tall blonde, with a beautiful figure, the hands of a duchess, and the feet of a child. She is about my own age, and she has beautiful blue eyes, full of expression. Come, you must surely know her."

"Yes, it must be Madame Marteau. In fact, I am sure of it. Her husband is keeper of the prison."

"What a name and what an office! I am surprised that Aurélie consented to marry a jailer."

"The general probably required the sacrifice of her. The general is the Marquis de Plancoët, isn't he?"

"Exactly. He commanded a brigade in Paris during the *coup d'état*. He must be a very influential person."

"Did Madame Marteau recognise you when you met her on your way here?"

"Yes. I stopped the carriage, and we chatted five minutes or more. It was she who warned me that you would not be particularly pleased to see me, and that I had made a great mistake in coming. I asked her if she would consent to pass me off as her sister; but she said that would be impossible, on account of her husband, who knew that she had no such relative."

"But he can't know all his wife's relations, and if your friend consented to introduce you as a distant cousin—"

"That would do, I'm sure. The only difficulty is that I can't go and ask her to do me this favour. She must live at the prison."

"Yes, and Marteau would receive you rather ungraciously if you ventured to go there. We must devise some way of speaking to her in private; and that will be no easy matter."

While they were talking, Coralie had made the tour of the apartment, and just at that moment she chanced to be standing near the window, gazing out upon the rather gloomy surroundings of the sub-prefecture. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Look, there she is now!"

"Who?" asked Vignory, thinking that the actress had lost her senses.

"Aurélié, of course. Where has she come from? I left her in the street, on the other side."

Vignory hastened to the window, and saw Madame Marteau ascending a little path that wound round the hill. "She must have chosen the longest way," he remarked, "for the prison is over there, behind the court-house."

"Well, let us take advantage of the opportunity," said Coralie, raising her hand to open the window, "I will beckon to her."

"No, no; the offices are on this side, and my clerks might see you. Besides, Madame Marteau is a very prudent woman. She wouldn't come up."

"Oh, you see difficulties everywhere. What a delightful position a sub-prefect's is."

"Come," said Vignory. "Can you remain here quietly for awhile, without answering, if anyone knocks at the door?"

"You need have no fears. I haven't the slightest desire to make the acquaintance of any of your subordinates. Besides, you can lock the door behind you. Are you going to try to overtake Aurélie?"

"Yes, and I haven't a moment to lose. I have a plan, and if she is as quick-witted as I think she is, she will understand the situation and help us out of this scrape; no one else can."

Vignory thereupon rushed out of the room, locked the door, put the key in his pocket and flew down the stairs, three steps at a time. In the vestibule, he met the doorkeeper, who was still holding Coralie's jewel-case and wraps in his hand, vainly asking himself what he should do with them. During the twenty years he had spent at the sub-prefecture, he had never before been placed in such a dilemma. "Jean," said Vignory, speaking to the point, "you are anxious to keep your place, I suppose, and in that case you must hold your tongue. The person you just saw was sent here by the government. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir—perfectly," said old Jean, not understanding in the least, however.

"The lady is now in my private-room, and no one must enter it until I return. If anyone asks to see me, you must say that I am at work upon my report, and that I cannot receive any visitors to-day. And whatever you may see, or hear, pay no attention. Interests of the greatest importance are at stake, and if you know how to keep silent, I promise to recommend you to the minister, and to secure to you a handsome reward."

"To the minister! You will mention me to the minister, sir?"

"Certainly, the humblest functionary is entitled to that when he serves the state faithfully," replied Vignory, majestically. "Return to your lodge, and take those articles with you. You can hand them to me when I return. I shall not be gone long."

The street by which Coralie had reached the sub-prefecture, crossed the path along which she had seen Madame Marteau walking—a path which skirted the sub-prefecture grounds, and which the people of Salviae styled the Lovers' Walk. Aurélie had already passed the point where the road cut across it, but Vignory had nimble limbs, and he overtook her at a turn in the path where some shrubbery conveniently screened them from prying eyes. Madame Marteau, who had heard him approaching, had turned and was now quietly waiting for him. It seemed, indeed, as if she had foreseen this meeting, and had prepared herself for it. Vignory accosted her politely, and though a little out of breath from his hurried walk, he lost no time in opening the conversation. "Excuse me for running after you, madame," he gaily

said, "Yon must have thought I had found your handkerchief, and was bringing it to you."

"But I haven't lost it," was the smiling reply.

"No; and I feel almost certain that you can guess why I have taken this liberty."

"I have a slight suspicion, but I should feel obliged if you would speak more plainly."

"A few moments ago you saw a post-chaise driving a lady to the sub-prefecture."

"Yes! Poor Coralie! She has acquainted you with the incident, I see. She ought to have returned to Paris at once as I advised her. She must already repent of her refusal to take my advice."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Vignory, "and in trying to find some way out of the difficulty, we both thought of you, who are as kind-hearted as you are beautiful."

"Thanks for the compliment, but what can I do? That mad-cap Coralie asked me to pass her off as my sister, but that was impossible."

"Your husband wouldn't believe it, but couldn't you pass her off as a distant relative, say, a cousin just arrived here, and give her hospitality for a few days? It seems you spent many pleasant days together in years past, and it is on account of the old friendship that I make bold to ask this favour."

"Why, my husband would lose his post."

"And you prefer that I should lose mine. Well, Coralie has a long tongue yon know, and it would not be pleasant for you if she gossiped about the fine time you once spent together."

The jailer's pretty wife turned pale. "If I understand you rightly," she said, "you would advise her to reveal my earlier life to my husband and the people here."

"I advise her? Oh! no, but if I'm dismissed on her account or turn her out of the sub-prefecture, she will go to the hotel. Then as she has been an actress all the gentry round about will pay her a deal of attention, and she will tell them all about her affairs and mine—and yours. If she relates that you led a fast life before you were married, there will be a terrible scandal, and then your husband will surely lose his post despite all General de Plancoët's protection—"

"General de Plancoët? Who told you about him?" said Aurélie out of countenance.

"Why, Coralie, of course. She tells anything she knows. Do you think the general will be pleased to hear that people gossip about him at Salviac?"

Aurélie was perceptibly disturbed and for a moment said nothing; but, at last, she replied impatiently, almost angrily:—"You must understand, sir, that what you ask is quite impracticable; besides, the remedy you propose would be worse than the disease. Coralie's sojourn in my house would inevitably give rise to all sorts of comments."

"But pray recollect that it will only last a few days. That will suffice for me to explain her presence here to the natives. She will find it so intolerably dull here, that she will be only too glad to return to Paris, and on the other hand I know how to concoct a plausible explanation for her visit."

"What explanation, if you please?"

"I shall tell your husband, and give others to understand, that she has

been sent here on a secret mission. It wouldn't be the first time the government has employed women as agents."

"The idea of Coralie charged with a political mission is really too absurd," said Madame Marteau, laughing in spite of her annoyance.

"It *is* a capital joke. And, if you like, we can easily deceive everybody."

"Including my husband, I suppose?"

"Of course, we can't take him into our confidence, but he sha'n't be a loser by it. On the contrary, I will report so favourably on his valuable services that he will soon be promoted, and he will be indebted to you for his advancement."

"But Coralie will play her part as an envoy-extraordinary rather badly, I fear."

"On the contrary, she will play it admirably. I know her. The idea of deceiving the natives will amuse her. I will give her a few instructions; besides, you will be on hand to watch her, and to prevent her from making any glaring blunder."

"If you think all this an easy matter, you are very much mistaken."

"Then you will deserve all the more credit, madame, and have all the stronger claim upon my gratitude."

Madame Marteau seemed to hesitate. "But I assure you that I can not imagine how to effect the introduction to my husband," she said.

"Why, I will introduce her to him myself, if you only tell me under what name to do so."

"Well, I have a distant cousin whom I haven't seen for ten years, but whom Pierre has frequently heard me mention. She is about my age, and is now residing, I believe, in Lyons, where she keeps a millinery shop. She isn't unlike Coralie in appearance—"

"That is the very thing then. What is her name?"

"Marie Minotte."

"All right. There have been disturbances at Lyons. Madame Marie Minotte has been of great service to the government in keeping it posted concerning the movements of the rebels there, and the commissary of that city, knowing that she had a relative at Salviac, has sent her here to watch the dangerous characters. The relative is Madame Marteau, wife of the chief warden, who now has several prisoners of importance in his custody, and who, at my request, will certainly receive and lodge Madame Minotte until her mission is accomplished. All that is plausible enough, and your husband will believe it."

"Yes, if you tell him yourself. He looks on all that his superiors tell him as gospel truth, and never criticises his orders. But think of the responsibility you are assuming. What if Marteau should take it into his head to report the occurrence to the prefect?"

"All the official reports pass through my hands, and he won't dare to write to him privately."

"I will do my best, then," said Aurélie, who was not without serious misgivings. "But remember that Coralie won't agree to remain at home all the time. She will be wanting to go out."

"What of that? You can accompany her to keep a watch on her."

"But if she wants to go to the sub-prefecture to see you?"

"She mustn't do that. The very reason why I want her to spend a few days here is to prevent it being supposed that she merely came on my account. I'll lecture her, and by way of a peace-offering, I shall promise



to go and see her in Paris next month as soon as I have got rid of all the important prisoners. As for yourself, I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for your kind offices."

"Save your thanks until by-and-bye. I am now going home, and if I find my husband there I shall not say a word to him about our meeting. As soon as Coralie is ready you must bring her to the prison. When you come, take my advice and cross the public square so that everybody may see that you have nothing to conceal."

"That is exactly what I intended to do."

"You must tell my husband the story we have agreed upon, and at the same time introduce Madame Marie Minotte to him. You won't forget the name?"

"No, certainly not, and I will take good care to impress it upon Coralie's memory."

"Very good. You can trust to me for the rest, and now for the present, good-bye," said the jailer's pretty wife, walking off at a rapid pace.

Vignory made no attempt to detain her, but walked back to the sub-prefecture, saying to himself: "Saved! Thanks, Aurélie Marteau. If your dolt of a husband isn't decorated, it won't be my fault, or yours."

### III.

EDMÉE CHANCELADE, after her brief interview with Madame Marteau, walked straight to the prison, where the chief-warder received her more graciously than she had expected. He not only allowed her to leave the linen and some other necessities, but promised to deliver them to his new prisoner. Edmée then ventured to ask permission to see her brother, but the jailer informed her that Louis Chancelade was not allowed to communicate with any one for the present. The orders were stringent and only the investigating magistrate had power to revoke them. Besides, the magistrate had returned from Bordeaux that morning, and was at that very moment examining the prisoner at the Palais de Justice.

Edmée made no complaint, but on learning that her brother was at the Palais de Justice, she resolved to wait and see him pass as he was taken back to prison, and so she stationed herself in the lane which he would be obliged to follow on his return. The cold was severe, and she ran great risk of contracting inflammation of the lungs by thus exposing herself, but she cared little for illness or even for death. Her father was on his way to exile, her brother would probably end his days upon the guillotine, and being thus left alone in the world, she set but little value on her life. She had no hope of saving her father, who had been so speedily and cruelly punished for taking part in an insurrection; but her brother was not an insurgent, and the murder with which he was charged, was an offence that must be tried by a court of assizes, for the days of summary executions were over. There was some chance of his acquittal, therefore, and Edmée did not yet despair, though she relied but little upon justice, so fierce were the political passions of the time.

She knew that the people of Salviac would sympathise with her in her misfortune, but sympathy would not suffice to save her brother, and few persons would be willing to compromise themselves by openly defending him. Even the Count de Sigoulès, who had exerted himself so zealously to obtain a pardon for the father, was not likely to do as much for the son.

The father had been one of his tenants, and he had felt obliged to do for him what his ancestors would have done for one of their vassals prior to the revolution of 1789. But he had little or no acquaintance with the son, who had never worked upon his estates, and whose political opinions were opposed to his own. He had tolerated them in the father, because he considered him an ignorant old fool ; but he could not forgive them in the son, who was so much better educated, and thus any influence he might possess or acquire with the powers of the day, would unquestionably be reserved for the benefit of his cousin, Adhémar de Mussidan. No doubt he pitied Edmée, and took a real interest in her welfare, but, after all, he could do nothing for her. In fact, she felt that she had no assistance to hope for from any one, and must depend entirely upon herself.

She had stood waiting for nearly an hour, with chilled feet and a heavy heart, when she saw M. Bourdeille, the presiding judge, and Dr. Thiviers approaching arm in arm, on their way to the court-house. They were old friends, and she made no attempt to avoid them. "What are you doing here, mademoiselle?" asked the doctor, with the friendly abruptness common to old country practitioners. "It is freezing hard enough to split the rocks. I cured you once, but I may not be able to do so again, so you will please run home as fast as you can."

"I am waiting for my brother," replied Edmée, shaking her head.

"Your brother ! What, are you expecting his release?"

"Oh, no ; but he is with the magistrate, and as soon as his examination is over, he will pass by here, and I shall see him."

"You will be none the better off for that, nor he either," said M. Bourdeille. "You had much better try to assist us in saving him. I don't believe he is guilty, but the case is very complicated. There were certainly grounds for suspecting him, as you yourself must admit. Half-an-hour after the commissary was shot, your brother came home with his gun on his shoulder, so it was thought he had committed the crime."

"The scoundrels who arrested him had set a trap for him. They forced an entrance into our house like so many thieves."

"Don't give way to violence, mademoiselle," said the judge. "It can do no good, and might do a deal of harm. There is one thing in all this that worries me greatly. The public prosecutor tells me that your brother obstinately refuses to give any account of the way in which he spent his evening, and his silence imparts increased weight to the charges against him. He may have reasons that I am ignorant of for remaining silent, but if he persists in this course, he will certainly be convicted. However, there is nothing to prevent you from speaking, mademoiselle. You must expect to be examined. Indeed, I am surprised that you have not already been summoned before the investigating magistrate. When you see him you can tell him how your brother spent his evening, where he went on leaving town, and where he was coming from when he returned."

"No, I cannot," said Edmée, curtly.

"You must know, however."

"And why? My brother isn't obliged to tell me where he is going whenever it pleases him to leave home. When he returned I had no opportunity to question him. The men who were watching for him arrested him before he had a chance to open his lips ; besides, I took good care not to question him in their presence."

"It will be difficult to convince people that you are ignorant of the reason of his absence. But excuse me for insisting—even if he did not

confide his plans to you, you must have guessed them. You know your brother's habits, his associates, and although delicacy induces him to keep silent from a fear of compromising some one, why shouldn't you tell me what you know about his unfortunate expedition yesterday evening? I am a magistrate, it is true, but I only decide civil cases. I have nothing whatever to do with criminal prosecutions. I take a deep interest in you. Speak to me openly as to a friend." Edmée cast down her eyes and said nothing, but her expression of face betrayed her emotion. The presiding judge had hit the nail upon the head, unquestionably, and satisfied on this point, he continued: "I will give you a hint. Suppose, for instance, your brother went to the woods to confer with some political friends—fugitives hiding there. There are several of them lurking about in the neighbourhood, as I know. Well, in that case, he could not tell the truth without betraying their secret, or indicating the spot where they had taken refuge, and he might regard it as a point of honour not to betray them. But you, mademoiselle, are not a conspirator, and you are under no obligation to remain silent, especially when your brother's life is at stake."

"Even if your suppositions were correct, I would not save him by denouncing unfortunate compatriots. It will be better for him to remain face to face with this absurd accusation. No jury will convict him without conclusive evidence, and that, I feel sure, will never be forthcoming."

M. Bourdeille was surprised to find so much firmness and presence of mind in an inexperienced young girl. On reflection, it occurred to him that, if her brother had not attended an appointment with some outlawed republicans, he might have been keeping one with some woman he was attached to. The kind old judge was considering how he could best question Edmée on such a delicate matter, for he realised that it was of the utmost importance that Louis Chancelade should establish an *alibi*, when the young school-master suddenly emerged from the court-house attended by two gendarmes. No humiliation had been spared him. He was hand-cuffed, but he walked erect, and his misfortunes did not seem to have conquered his pride. Edmée would have darted towards him, but M. Bourdeille interposed, for he knew that the gendarmes would certainly prevent the poor girl from holding any communication with the prisoner. However, Louis was not gagged, and as he passed by he called out to his sister: "Thanks, Edmée! Go home, and don't worry about me. I am a prisoner; but they won't get my head, or extort any confession from me."

The lane which separated the court-house from the prison was a short one. The gendarmes hurried Louis along, and the prison gates closed upon him before his sister, speechless with emotion, had time to utter a word. The judge and the doctor exchanged glances. They had heard the prisoner's words of defiance, and they were both thinking of the concluding ones. "They will extort no confession from me," so had Louis cried to Edmée, and he had evidently implied, "I have revealed nothing. Follow my example." So there was a secret between the brother and sister; but what secret? Was it in view of establishing an *alibi* that they had mutually sworn to be silent; or was it, on the contrary, in connection with some proof of Chancelade's guilt? It was difficult to say, and the two gentlemen concluded that it would not only be useless but dangerous to insist any further. Edmée was firmly resolved to say nothing; and even if an imprudent word were to escape her, they preferred not to hear it. The doctor was attached to Edmée Chancelade, and he would have been very sorry to learn from her lips that her brother's innocence was

doubtful; while the judge did not care to burden his conscience with revelations which his professional duty would not allow him to keep to himself.

While they were thus reflecting, they perceived to their great surprise the sub-prefect coming towards them, having a lady attired in a travelling costume on his arm—a lady whom the good people of Salviac had never seen before. M. Vignory had the grave and deferential air of a man who is doing the honours of his town to a lady of distinction. He had just crossed the square where the idlers of the place were wont to assemble, and his appearance had created a sensation there, for several of the loungers had proceeded towards the court-house, and were now watching their sub-prefect, astonished to see him in such charming company. The judge and the doctor were equally amazed, and asked themselves if they ought to walk off, or await the approach of the pair? If they moved on, it would look very much as if they were running away; but, on the other hand, if they remained where they stood, they must prepare for the inevitable meeting. Should they bow, or pretend not to recognize Vignory? In Paris, it is the rule with well-bred people to respect the *incognito* of a gentleman in company with a strange lady; but at Salviac, and especially when the sub-prefect was in question, such a course would be a gross breach of politeness.

Thoroughly independent, both by profession and character, Dr. Thiviers was inclined to ignore M. Vignory, but M. Bourdeille hesitated to take such a decided step. The presence of Edmée Chancelade made the situation worse, for Vignory would certainly be astonished to see a magistrate like M. Bourdeille in conversation with the sister of an acknowledged rebel, the supposed murderer of the commissary. The brave girl had not moved, but stood gazing with haughty indifference at the man who had arrested her brother. He seemed equally unembarrassed, and as he passed the little group, he extricated the gentlemen from their dilemma by bowing first, but without pausing. This was equivalent to saying: "I am discharging my official duties, I have no desire to hide myself, but out of respect for the lady I am escorting, I can not enter into a conversation in the public street."

At least, so they understood him, and they confined themselves to bowing; but their astonishment was unbounded when they saw M. Vignory and his companion enter the jail. "I can't understand it," muttered M. Bourdeille. "Can our sub-prefect be taking that lady to prison?"

"I fancy that they are going to pay Madame Marteau a visit," replied Dr. Thiviers. "She is a Parisienne, you know, and this lady looks as if she had come from the capital. They may be acquainted with each other, though I don't understand why the new-comer should go about under Monsieur Vignory's protection. However, we shall know what to think before night-time, for I never yet heard of a mystery that our beloved fellow-citizens did not succeed in solving in less than twenty-four hours."

In their excitement over the problem so unexpectedly presented for their solution the two gentlemen had quite forgotten Edmée's presence. She reminded them of it, however, by saying: "You are the prison physician, my dear doctor, and I commend my unfortunate brother to your care. He is extremely nervous, and if he should fall ill—"

"Be easy, my dear child, I will take care of him as if he were my son. He was remarkably well last evening, however, and a short sojourn in the prison can do him no harm. Quiet and seclusion are excellent sedatives,

providing they do not last too long—and I am sure that Louis will soon succeed in proving his innocence—especially if you decide to help him.”

Edmée realised that the doctor was about to beg her to reveal what she knew, and she did not wish to listen to him. “Farewell, gentlemen!” she said, abruptly.

“*Au revoir*, mademoiselle,” replied M. Bourdeille.

Walking rapidly away, Edmée found, at the foot of the hill, a little group of idlers who had gathered there to wait for the return of the sub-prefect and the fair stranger. They, for the most part, belonged to the petty middle-classes, and did not take much interest in Louis Chancelade’s misfortunes. Some even believed him guilty; however, when his sister passed, every head was instantly uncovered. The fact is, all the people of Salviac loved and respected Edmée. She had done so much good, and whatever her opinions might be, she had never taken any active part in politics; it was certainly no fault of hers if her father had rebelled against the new government, or if her brother had rendered himself liable to be suspected of the murder of a prominent official. She thanked her acquaintances for this token of sympathy by a grateful bow, but did not stop to speak to them. Indeed, not wishing to compromise any one, she pursued her way with her eyes lowered, in order to avoid seeing any friend who might be tempted to accost her. To reach home, she had to proceed along the high street, and pass the café frequented by the gilded youth of Salviac. Martial Mouleydier often enjoyed himself there, and that afternoon he chanced to be holding forth respecting the Chancelade affair at the door of the establishment, surrounded by a throng of attentive listeners. When he saw Edmée coming up the street he was foolish enough to bow to her. Her only response was a scornful glance; and to better display her loathing for her brother’s betrayer, she drew the hood of her mantle down over her face, and passed by with her head averted.

At last she reached the old house in which she had lived from her earliest infancy. Her mother had died there, her brother had just been arrested there; and though she was left forlorn and desolate, she had no intention of ever leaving it, for she had no thought of marriage—not that she had made a formal vow to remain single like the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, but because she preferred to devote herself entirely to the poor, whose benefactress she was. She had refused to see any of her friends since her brother’s arrest; she had even sent away her only servant, an old peasant woman, who had once been her nurse. She had dismissed her because she was not sure of her discretion, and she had decided not to take any one in her place. On reaching her sitting-room, she now found a good fire blazing on the hearth, and she seated herself in front of it in an old arm-chair that had always been reserved for her father in the days when he was a happy and prosperous farmer. While warming her feet at the fire, she sank into a gloomy reverie. She reflected that although she had a few faithful friends, she could not hope for any real help from them. Dr. Thiviers was a good-natured sceptic who took everything philosophically, and who loved his ease above all things. M. Bourdeille, the judge, had a fine mind and a good heart, but his position prevented him from openly espousing the cause of a prisoner whom all the other legal functionaries believed guilty. As for the Count de Sigoulès, he had business enough on hand to protect his own relative, Adhémar de Mussidan.

Somewhere in the neighbourhood there was a young fellow who was certainly a particular friend of Louis, a young man ever ready to assist

both the brother and the sister whom he had known and loved for years ; but he had excellent reasons for not showing himself at this juncture, as he, also, had been implicated in the December insurrection, and his interference would consequently do more harm than good. Edmée did not exactly know his whereabouts, though she was aware that Louis had seen him quite recently, and indeed she suspected that they had been jointly planning some bold and dangerous undertaking.

Louis, though he was warmly attached to his sister, did not tell her everything, still, on leaving her the evening before, he had disclosed the object of an expedition which he was about to make, and she had ardently prayed for the success of his enterprise. The few words he had spoken at the moment of his arrest had informed her that this undertaking had failed, and she was inconsolable at the failure ; still, the misfortune, great as it was, touched her less deeply than the terrible charge against her brother. She thought that she was only a woman, and unable to render him any assistance, irritated her terribly. Had she been a man, she would have attempted to force open the doors of the prison ; and she would gladly have risked her life had she been able to head an armed movement against her brother's jailers. It was a senseless dream, perhaps ; still, others might be able to carry it into execution. Sometimes a daring man can accomplish a well-nigh impossible task. And thus reflecting, she soon began to think that such a man of action might be found in the person of her brother's friend.

His name was Jacques, and, after serving for some time as a gamekeeper on M. de Sigoulès' estate, he had turned poacher, and for the past two years had spent most of his time in the woods, sleeping far more frequently in the open air than in a bed. As he was an old and good friend, the young schoolmaster had not cast him off when he saw him begin to lead an irregular life, and Edmée had had many opportunities to appreciate his good qualities before he became a poacher. This strange young fellow had conceived an ardent passion for her, and had made a great mistake in showing it too plainly, for, after treating him in a friendly manner, Edmée had felt compelled to keep him at a distance. Not that she disliked him ; on the contrary. He had neither the thick-set figure and heavy bearing of the Dordogne peasants nor the drowsy air that characterizes the Périgourdins. He was much more like a Gascon, being tall, slender, and nimble, with delicate features, and an expressive mobile face. He had the qualities and failings of those D'Artagnans who now only exist in the romances of the great Dumas—all their power of repartee, their love of adventure, their dashing bravery, and also their spirit of independence, verging almost upon a contempt for social usages.

Maybe he had noble blood in his veins, for he had never known either his father or his mother. He had been found under a chestnut-tree, one fine morning, on the estate of the Count de Sigoulès, who had intrusted him to the care of his gardener's wife. Afterwards he had been sent to school, and the priest noting his unusual intelligence, had taken a great liking to him, and charged himself with his education, intending to send him to the seminary later on, and make him an accomplished divine. But although Jacques learnt French and a little Latin, with great ease, he ran away so often to rove about the fields, and proved so erratic and undisciplined, that his benefactor was obliged to admit that he was quite unfit for an ecclesiastical career. Thereupon M. de Sigoulès decided to make a gamekeeper of him. Poachers were killing his game and stealing his

vegetables. Jacques seemed quite capable of protecting the partridges and the potatoes, and, indeed, he acquitted himself of his duties very creditably, until one day, when, in consequence of a quarrel with some neighbours, he left the count without the slightest notice, and went to live in the woods, just like the Corsicans retire to their native wilds when they have killed a man in a vendetta.

Jacques had killed no one, but he was at war with everybody except the Chancelades. The old farmer always gave him a cordial welcome whenever he asked for a seat at his fireside, and the young school-teacher liked to talk with him, for they generally agreed upon the great political and social questions of the day. Edmée saw him less frequently, as she lived in town, where he seldom appeared; still not a week passed by without her receiving a bouquet of wild flowers or a brace of partridges, brought by some obliging peasant woman in the basket in which she carried her eggs to market. Edmée accepted these trifling gifts from her brother's friend without any scruples, sending him powder and shot in exchange, which was a strange course, as she had a presentiment that the life he was leading would end badly.

This friendly intercourse had ceased after the insurrectionary movement excited by the *coup d'état*, for Jacques, who had figured among the insurgents, was obliged to secrete himself. Louis alone knew his hiding-place, and he had not confided the secret to his sister. Now that Louis was arrested, she would have given anything to have known Jacques', precise whereabouts. Ingenious and intrepid as he was, he would certainly have found a means of succouring his comrade. However, he was undoubtedly ignorant of the fact that Louis was in prison, and Edmée could devise no way of acquainting him with it.

Still, while reflecting, she remembered that occasionally, in months gone by, when Jacques was only liable to arrest as a poacher, he had occasionally ventured into a wood that crowned the heights on the other side of the Dronne, and displayed a signal from the top of a lofty beech-tree. This signal signified, "May I come to-night?" and was addressed to Louis, who, when he happened to be in Salviac, replied by lighting a bonfire of vine branches in his garden, the smoke of which warned Jacques that his friend would be awaiting him on the river bank two hours after sunset. As it happened, they had resorted to this kind of telegraphy only a couple of evenings previously, and had met at the appointed place. Edmée now said to herself that Jacques would perhaps repeat his signal, and if she saw it, there would be nothing to prevent her from replying to it, and going to the rendezvous that evening in her brother's place. The windows of the room in which she was warming herself, overlooked the street, and she could see nothing from them, so she decided to repair to the garden which stretched above the valley just opposite the wooded height upon which the signal beech-tree stood.

It was a real hanging garden like those of all the houses on the east side of the town. The little wall that surrounded it overhung a precipice, and at one end of it, near the adjacent parsonage, there was a rugged mass of rock that rose from the base of the cliff to a level with the summit of the wall. However, it seemed likely that only a goat could scale this precipitous height.

Edmée glanced at the hill opposite and perceived the signal-tree, but its lofty branches did not bear the red rag which Jacques hoisted whenever he wished to announce his presence. Disappointed in her hopes and feeling

cold, she had just decided to return to the house, when a slight sound made her start—the sound made by the fall of a handful of pebbles almost at her very feet. Could this be a signal? From whom? From some friend who was unable to announce his presence in another fashion? This seemed improbable, and yet Edmée promptly resolved to solve the mystery. Approaching the wall, and leaning over it, she beheld to her great astonishment her brother's friend, Jacques, perched, like a chamois, on a point of rock scarcely large enough for his two feet to rest upon, and clinging with one hand to a projecting stone. How had he managed to climb the almost perpendicular cliff, and what could have been his object? Did he hope to gain an entrance into the garden, or had he taken refuge upon this crag to escape some pursuers? These suppositions flitted through Edmée's mind in an instant, and she could not repress an exclamation of wonder.

Jacques, hearing it, glanced up, and motioned her away. She fancied that he was afraid some one might see them together; and they were, indeed, plainly visible from the windows of the neighbouring houses. Accordingly she complied with Jacques' injunctions, and slowly retreated towards the house-door. A moment later she saw Jacques' felt hat appear above the wall—a felt hat that gave him rather the air of a brigand; then his hands clinging to the top of the wall; then his shoulders and trunk, and finally his sturdy legs, encased in grey linen gaiters. By what miracle of agility had he accomplished the ascent? It seemed incredible.

However, he leaped lightly over the wall, and a few hurried steps brought him to the open door near which Edmée was standing, pale with emotion. "Come in quick," she said, making way for him.

She was not obliged to repeat the invitation, and as soon as he had entered the house, she hastily locked and bolted the garden door. She secured the street-door in the same way, and then returned to Jacques who was waiting for her, bareheaded, with a little bouquet of wild flowers in his hand. "Take them," said he. "I plucked them for you under the very eyes of the gendarmes."

"The gendarmes! they are following you?" she cried.

"They were after me all last night, but they were on horseback, and I led them through paths where they found it hard travelling. But you scorn my poor flowers, it seems."

She took them so as not to wound him, but she had no heart to thank him, and hastily resumed: "Why do you come to Salviac in broad daylight? It is very dangerous for you to do so."

"It wasn't sunrise when I reached here. It was all settled between Louis and me before we separated. He promised me that if he reached Salviac before I did, he would wait for me in the garden. But it was I who had to wait for him. I have been waiting ever since seven o'clock this morning, and it isn't warm by any means. I dared not leave my perch, however, because I feared some misfortune had happened, and that the house was occupied by the gendarmes. When I heard you walking on the gravel, I thought it was Louis, and so ventured to warn him of my presence. I was mistaken, however, but I am glad it proved to be you. It is so long since I saw you."

"I, also, am glad to see you, Jacques."

"One would not think so. How sad you look! Has any misfortune befallen you?"

"Yes, Jacques, the greatest of all misfortunes. Louis was arrested just as he returned home, and is now in prison."



"I suspected as much. Some one must have denounced him."

"Yes, a scoundrel whose name I will tell you presently. But you are dying of cold. Come upstairs with me. There is a fire in the sitting-room."

Jacques followed her, and approached the hearth with evident satisfaction. In fact, he must have been made of iron to have endured exposure so long.

"Tell me what occurred last night on the road to Perigueux," said Edmée, just as he was about to ask her the particulars of his friend's arrest.

"What! didn't Louis tell you of our unfortunate adventures?" he exclaimed.

"He hadn't time to do so. He was merely able to say that he had failed, and then the gendarmes seized hold of him. But you can tell me how the enterprise fell through. Did your friends fail you?"

"Yes. You know that we intended to attack the escort which was to conduct your father to Perigueux. The spot we selected was a wood just where the highway crosses the road to Champagnac. We expected that the carriage and the gendarmes would reach that point at about nine o'clock. I notified six young men, who have been fugitives like myself for the past month. Of the six of us three had guns; the gendarmes numbered only five, so the game seemed in our favour. But how many of the party do you suppose there were upon the ground?"

"Perhaps three."

"Two, mademoiselle. Your brother and myself. The six others were afraid to come, the cowards!"

"So you let the carriage pass?"

"No, unfortunately. Louis was furious, and so was I. The others did not make their appearance, and we could already hear the carriage approaching in the distance, whereupon I suggested that we two should make the attempt unaided."

"That was folly."

"Bah! Who risks nothing, gains nothing. We had four shots to fire, and we had considerable advantage in position, as we had climbed a bank on the side of the road. I said to myself, 'At the first shot the convoy will stop, then I will make a deuce of a noise, and shout, 'Pierre, Jean, Guillaume, forward!' The gendarmes will think there are at least a dozen of us, and will either bolt or charge us, whereupon I will call out still more loudly, and they will rush upon me. In the meantime Louis can attack the driver, who won't defend himself, being unarmed, and Louis can also drag his father out of the carriage and into the wood. Once there, the old fellow will be safe.' However, it happened that we had to deal with a commander who did not lose his senses—an old quarter-master who had served in the Algerian chasseurs, and who was accustomed to surprises. Louis fired first; and I fancy that he fired in the air. You know he pretends that no one has a right to kill even an enemy, except in self-defence. At all events he hit no one. Thereupon, the quarter-master gave a hasty order to the driver and his men. Two of the latter started off at a gallop, one on each side of the carriage, which drove on as fast as possible. The three remaining gendarmes then fired their pistols at us. I fired in my turn, and I feel almost certain that I wounded one man. Louis also fired a second time. However, they all three turned upon me, very fortunately. I darted into the wood; they pursued me for about five minutes, and then gave up the chase. The underbrush was too dense; besides, they could

not see their hands before them, so they soon started after the carriage, which was already some distance away. Our attempt was a failure. I did not know where Louis was, but I presumed he had returned to Salviac by a short cut across the fields. We had agreed, in case of failure, that each of us should make his escape as best he could, and that I should come here a little before sunrise. I had plenty of time at my disposal, so I returned to the Valade wood, where I had been hiding for more than a week. I there buried my gun under the pile of leaves that serves me as a bed, took a good nap, and started down the river-bank for Salviac at about five o'clock this morning."

"You now know, why my brother failed to keep his appointment."

"Yes, but I don't understand how the gendarmes got here just in time to arrest him. Did they know that Louis intended to attack the escort last evening?"

"That isn't the crime he is charged with. The commissary-general from Paris, was shot in front of the club-house last night, about half an hour before my brother's return, and some gendarmes were here lying in wait for Louis when he came back."

"And they dare to say that it was he who shot that man. Ah, well, I will convince them of your brother's innocence. I will go and surrender myself, and tell them that Louis was with me, last night, on the road to Perigueux."

"Surrender yourself!" cried Edmée. "It would do no good! You would ruin yourself and aggravate his danger, as another crime would be imputed to him."

"A political crime," replied Jacques, promptly, "and certainly a very excusable one, as he was trying to rescue his own father. I am surprised that Louis did not reveal the truth rather than let himself be charged with murder."

"He could not disclose the truth without injuring you. No one would believe that he went alone, to lie in wait for the gendarmes, on the public highway. You would be the first person suspected, for it is known that you are his most intimate friend. The country would be scoured until you were found, and you would share my brother's fate."

"But the fact that the gendarmes were attacked last night must be known in Salviac by this time."

"I don't think so, and even if it were, I feel sure that my brother would deny all knowledge of the affair, supposing he were questioned."

"Ah, well, I shall go and tell the authorities what occurred. Louis could not be three miles from Salviac and under the windows of the club-house at the same time."

"You forget that you attacked the gendarmes at nine o'clock, while the commissary was not killed until eleven. A rapid walker could easily have returned to town by then, and Louis is a wonderful pedestrian. So if you went to make a statement, you might be accused of having helped him to murder the commissary. I will not allow you to sacrifice yourself like that. Remember that you are the only friend I have left now."

"Then you at last believe that I love you!" exclaimed Jacques, eagerly

"I believe you love me as if I were your sister," replied Edmée, withdrawing her hand which Jacques had endeavoured to secure possession of. "I certainly love you as if you were my brother, though I greatly disapprove of the life which you have been leading for the past two years; I hope that you will abandon it some day and become a soldier."

"I'll do that when we have a republic, but until then, I shall not lay down my arms. I shall begin by trying to save Louis."

"But Louis is kept in close solitary confinement in prison, and no one can hold any communication with him. They have even refused me permission to see him."

"I shall dispense with a permission, and I swear I will reach him in some way or other. The attempt may cost me my life, but what does that matter! I feel sure that you will sometimes think of me when I have died to serve you."

"I often think of you now, Jacques, and if you don't wish to grieve me don't risk your life unnecessarily. Besides, Louis won't remain long in prison here. His persecutors will send him to Perigueux, where he will be tried by jury; and I have reason to be thankful for that, for if he were tried before a mixed commission he would be convicted in advance, and the penalty would be death."

"And if he is sent into exile?"

"I shall follow him everywhere, even to the foot of the scaffold; and if they transport him I shall join him, as I should have joined my father had my brother remained in France."

"And I, also, will follow him to Cayenne, if he is sent there. But whatever you may say, I shall first try to get him out of this prison."

"You can not spend a day in Salviac without being arrested."

"I can conceal myself."

"Here—in this house? You make a great mistake. I am not safe from arrest myself. The first time the house was searched you would be captured, and what would people say if you were found here?"

"Heaven forbid that I should make you liable to slander, mademoiselle. I shall leave the Valade woods and move my headquarters to the hills on the other side of the Dronne. At night time I can easily examine the surroundings of the prison, until I discover a means to gain an entrance, which will probably be by way of the roof, for climbing is my speciality, you know."

Edmée shook her head despondently. "Listen to me, Jacques," she said. "I have no right to give you any orders, but I beg of you not to endanger your life. What would become of me if I lost you now?"

The outlaw turned pale with emotion, and said in a trembling voice. "You will marry, mademoiselle. There are plenty of worthy men who would be glad to marry you. I should die of grief, if I were still alive, but I shouldn't complain, for I know that I am not worthy of you. Ah! if I could only save your brother, and afterwards return to the right path—"

"I forgot that you had ever strayed from it," replied the girl, deeply moved by this artless confession. "But I entreat you, Jacques, to cease dreaming of impossibilities and to reflect upon the dangers that threaten us all. You would ruin Louis by interfering in his behalf. Think of your own safety. Leave this part of the country—leave France, and enlist in some foreign army; and by-and-bye when these political dissensions are over, return to Salviac. You will find me the same, my feelings will not have changed."

"Then you allow me to hope!" cried Jacques, eagerly. And, savage as he was, he was about to throw himself at Edmée's feet, when she restrained him.

"Think of Louis," she said, gazing at him with her eyes glistening with tears, "I am going to speak to you as he would speak, if he were here."

'Jacques,' he would say, 'my friend, my brother, you have not deserted me in the hour of my adversity—brighter days will perhaps dawn, when our persecuted and scattered family will gather once more around a now desolate fireside, and then you will be welcome, if you still desire to become one of our household. But that time has not yet arrived. Don't cherish hopes which might deprive you of energy. Think of the struggle in which we are engaged—be firm, for your own sake, as well as for that of Edmée. But struggle for yourself alone. No more generous folly! Save yourself for the day of triumph, which must surely come for the cause we serve; and do not trouble about me, for I shall be able to defend myself.'"

"So be it," said Jacques, lifting his head proudly, like a soldier whose heart has just been fired by the stirring words of his general. "Your will shall be obeyed, mademoiselle. Louis shall have no reason to reproach me, when we meet again; and in the meantime, I swear you shall never again hear me speak of my love until I have proved myself worthy of being listened to. And now forgive me for having so unceremoniously intruded here. I would leave the house instantly, but in broad daylight, I could not go a hundred yards without being recognised. So will you allow me to remain here till nightfall? It will soon come, as it always does at this season of the year."

"Allow you to remain here!" repeated the young girl. "Can you suppose that I wish any misfortune to befall you, or that I lack sufficient confidence in you to spend a few hours with you? I should be glad to have you stay here always. The only thing is I have reason to fear our enemies, and if they took it into their heads to search the house, they would be sure to find you."

"No; for at the first suspicious sound I should take refuge on my crag. But it would be better not to run any risk, so I will try to find a corner in your garret where I can sleep until nightfall. If I might venture to give you a word of advice," he continued, "it would be to go out and show yourself in the town. Seeing you in the street, no one will suspect that any one is hiding at your house."

"I have already been out once to-day. I had just returned when I went into the garden. But no matter. I have a sick person to visit—a poor woman whose husband has been arrested, and who is dying of consumption. I will go to see her at once, and try to ascertain if people are talking about your attack upon the gendarmes. You had now better go upstairs and rest, and if I am late in returning home don't wait for me."

"I sha'n't go without bidding you good-bye. Who knows when we may meet again?—never, perhaps," muttered Jacques, sadly.

"What an idea!" said the young girl, although she was almost as deeply moved as her lover.

"She might perhaps have said more than she intended, had not a loud knocking at the street door at this moment resounded through the house. Jacques darted towards the window, in order to see who had rapped, but Edmée, realizing the danger he might incur by showing himself, caught hold of his arm and said hurriedly: "Quick!—conceal yourself! I will open the door, and if you hear several voices, fly!"

A second knock, even louder than the first one, now resounded, and the young girl went down-stairs, while Jacques hastily beat a retreat to the attic. She had advised him to decamp, but she had neglected to tell him what way he must take in order to avoid passing through the hall. After

satisfying herself by a glance that he was not behind her, she opened the front door and found herself in the presence of a gentleman, who was so closely muffled up that she did not at first recognize him, though his manner was friendly. "Mademoiselle," he said, unfastening the large handkerchief that concealed the lower part of his face, "excuse me for disturbing you, but it is necessary for me to speak to you, and the street is a poor place for conversation in this cold weather."

Edmée now saw that her visitor was M. Braconné, the leader of the Salviac bar. She had no reason to distrust him, for he was a most worthy man, and highly esteemed by his fellow-citizens, including Louis Chancelade, who believed him to be at heart a republican. Moreover, he had always been extremely kind to the Chancelade family. At the time of the father's arrest he had offered to defend him, and it required no little courage to act as the champion of a rebel so soon after an insurrection. It had, however, been impossible for Chancelade to avail himself of the offer, as his trial had not been conducted in the usual way; still M. Braconné had interested himself in him, and in his children, and had shown them marks of sympathy for which Edmée felt deeply grateful. However, she hesitated to admit him to the house as Jacques was still there, and she did not feel sufficient confidence in him to tell him all her secrets.

"It isn't advisable for passers-by to see us talking upon your doorstep," now continued M. Braconné. "I am not disposed to do anything on the sly, but a spirit of evil is rife in our town, and—"

"Come in, sir," interrupted Edmée.

M. Braconné lost no time in availing himself of this permission, and Edmée was obliged to take him up into the sitting-room where there was a fire, for she could not decently receive him in the cold hall. The leader of the Salviac bar was not much over forty years of age, and was still a fine looking man, although rather inclined to stoutness. He was a widower, without children, and resided alone in the house next to the Chancelades. He worked hard at his profession, holding briefs in all the more important cases that came before the local tribunal, and his only diversion was an occasional game of whist at the club in the evening. "Mademoiselle," he began, seating himself in an arm-chair, "I have come to tell you that I will gladly defend your brother in his approaching trial, for I am now satisfied that he is innocent of the crime imputed to him."

"You are *now* satisfied," repeated Edmée, sorrowfully. "Then you must have believed him guilty at first."

"No, not at first. I was present when the commissary was killed, and I certainly did not think that the shot had been fired by your brother. This morning I received information that caused me to change my mind; but since then I have changed it again, and I am now firmly convinced that he is not the culprit. I am positive of it, in fact, for I have learnt several things that I was ignorant of before. The gendarmes who escorted the carriage which conveyed your father to Périgueux last night were attacked on the way. Were you aware of the fact?"

"I just heard so. But what of it?" asked Edmée, who was anxious to let the lawyer state all he knew.

"I have no desire to pry into your secrets, mademoiselle," rejoined M. Braconné; "I even advise you to keep them to yourself if you have any; but I thought it best to tell you upon what I based my conviction of your brother's innocence. You understand me, don't you?"

Edmée cast down her eyes and said nothing.

"I will add that I don't propose to prove an *alibi*," continued the lawyer, "though I might do so without the slightest difficulty. I shall let the jury understand that Louis was probably one of the party that assailed the escort, but I shall take good care not to insist upon the point. That would be a great mistake, for the prosecution would not fail to reply that one crime did not prevent the other, as they were not committed at the same time. It is important that no ill-advised friends should try to clear Louis of the charge of murder by spreading a report that he took part in the attack upon the escort, or, what would be still worse, by proving that he was there."

"No one will do that," replied Edmée in a decided tone.

"Your word is sufficient, mademoiselle; and now I only have to tell you how I intend to defend your brother."

"I can trust that to your talent and your kind heart, sir. You have always been a friend to our family; you have known us a long time, and you are aware that Louis is incapable of a cowardly attack upon an enemy."

"That is exactly what I shall tell the jury, and I am sure I shall convince them. But I shall also employ an argument which I consider irrefutable. Your brother was arrested while in possession of a gun, both barrels of which had been recently fired. Now, but one shot was fired at the commissary. Nor is this all. A *post-mortem* examination was made this morning, and the bullet that killed the commissary is apparently that of a military weapon. It was extracted from the dead man's breast, and the authorities are keeping it as an article of conviction. Now it is evident that it was not fired from Louis Chancelade's gun, as its size is much too large. It was Doctor Thiviers who apprised me of these facts. In the presence of such a proof as this, no jury will convict him, and I can vouch for his acquittal."

"Oh, if you will restore my brother to me, sir, I shall never be able to prove my gratitude."

"I shall consider myself only too fortunate if I can be of service to you," said M. Braconne, giving Edmée a look which slightly disturbed her. She intuitively felt that he liked her better than she cared, and had certain views respecting her.

"I will vouch for his acquittal," he resumed, "but only upon one condition—that my system of defence is not interfered with; the slightest indiscretion or imprudence would ruin it completely. For instance, if one of the party who attacked the escort the other night, impelled by some sentiment of mistaken generosity, ventured to surrender himself, and say that your brother was with him, all would then be lost; for your brother, instead of being tried before the assizes, would be sent before a commission which would treat him as it treated your father. He would be shipped for Cayenne, and you would never see him again."

"That shall not happen, I promise you."

"The result would be the same if any attempt were made to rescue him from prison. It would not prove successful, and the effect would be to bring about his immediate transfer to some other jail. By the way, I shall need to consult him, and to-morrow I shall see the investigating magistrate who will give me the requisite permission no doubt."

"If you see Louis you must tell him you have seen me, and assure him that he can rely upon me, no matter what may happen."

"I promise you that, mademoiselle, and I will now bid you good-bye until I have some good news to bring you."

M. Braconne thereupon rose, shook hands with Edmée, and turned to go. She accompanied him to the door, and as he left her, he remarked, meaningly : " No imprudence, remember."

She understood him, and returned to the sitting-room, convinced that her benevolent neighbour had seen Jacques scaling the garden wall, and that he understood the situation perfectly well. Desirous of not losing any time in acquainting her rash lover with the advice of the cautious advocate, she hastened up to the garret in search of him, but her efforts to find him proved fruitless. He had probably departed by the same dangerous way that he had come, and Louis' fate seemed at the mercy of a friend who was quite devoid of prudence.

#### IV

EVERYTHING had passed off smoothly at the prison, and the plan agreed upon between the sub-prefect and the jailer's pretty wife had been carried out in every particular, Coralie playing her part to perfection. Pierre Marteau had certainly been greatly surprised when M. Vignory appeared with his fair companion, and gravely explained that this young and remarkably attractive lady was not only his wife's cousin, but also a government emissary, charged with a secret mission. Accustomed to passive obedience, the chief warden did not doubt his superior's word, but he did venture to express his astonishment at not having been informed of this relative's intended arrival, though any doubts he may have felt as to relationship were dispelled when he saw his wife throw herself into the newcomer's arms, and call her, " My dear Marie !"

The meeting was quite touching, and after a few words of explanation to Madame Marteau, Vignory took his leave, congratulating the husband on being thus called upon to further the interests of the government. He felt satisfied that the tact and shrewdness of the beautiful Aurélie would accomplish the rest. He was right, for Madame Marteau knew very well how to cajole her husband, and she so thoroughly propitiated him in this instance, that he even offered to give up his own room to their visitor. The two ladies would not consent to this arrangement, however, but decided that a bed should be placed in a dressing-room that adjoined Aurélie's apartment.

When Marteau was summoned away, by his duties, his wife lost no time in entering upon the necessary explanation with her friend. She began by reminding Coralie that they were both playing a very dangerous game, and one that must not be unduly prolonged. She had consented to take a hand in it to oblige Vignory, but she would not go to the extent of seriously compromising her husband.

Coralie replied that she was not anxious to remain any length of time at Salviac, or to make the acquaintance of any of the natives. She would much rather spend her time in talking about by-gone days with her friend, and promised to follow her advice in all things. Somewhat reassured by this declaration, Madame Marteau resolved to unburden her heart to her. Not that she had implicit confidence in Coralie, but she relied, and with reason, upon the sort of freemasonry that exists between women, especially when there is anything connected with their past or present that they desire to conceal. After a prolonged chat, Aurélie proposed a stroll on the esplanade overlooking the valley of the Dronne, and the two women went

there to admire the beautiful view from the vicinity of the club-house. This afforded Aurélie an opportunity to inform her companion of the tragedy of the previous evening, and Coralie listened with great interest to the narrative. Indeed, on hearing that the supposed murderer was already in prison, she became seized with an intense desire to see him, especially when she learned that he was a very handsome young man.

Madame Marteau dampened her ardour by telling her that he was kept in close confinement, and not allowed to communicate with anyone; still Coralie did not abandon all hope. Returning home after an hour or so spent in walking about the little town, and ridiculing the inhabitants, who paused to stare at them as if they were curiosities, they found that Pierre Marteau was away, having been summoned by the investigating magistrate who had some further orders to give him. So the two women were at liberty to spend their time as they pleased. Having exhausted confidential revelations, Madame Marteau seated herself at the piano, and played some of Musard's quadrilles which reminded Coralie of the opera balls in Paris. She began dancing about, and amid her gambols approached the window and gave a look out. Then with a gesture of surprise she returned to Madame Marteau's side. "That is he, is it not?" she asked.

"Who do you mean?" inquired Aurélie, quietly.

"The handsome prisoner, of course," replied her friend.

Aurélie, thinking that Coralie referred to the inmate of the cell opposite the room in which they were sitting, left the piano and hastened to the window. But it was not M. de Mussidan that Coralie was admiring. It was Louis Chancelade who was walking about the prison court-yard, under the eyes of one of the keepers, and quietly smoking a cigarette. "He is superb!" murmured Coralie, gazing at him with enraptured eyes. "There isn't a man in Paris to equal him. He's four times as big as Charlie."

"He isn't a bad-looking fellow, I admit," replied Aurélie, "but he has got himself into a terrible scrape, and you will make a great mistake if you start a flirtation with him. A government emissary flirting with a prisoner accused of murder—that would sound well, wouldn't it? If my husband found it out, you and I would both be in a nice fix."

"Bah! it won't do any harm for me just to smile at him." And taking advantage of a moment when the keeper's back was turned, and Chancelade happened to look up, Coralie gave him a laughing nod, to which he replied by a grateful bow, without pausing, however, in his promenade.

"Are you mad?" cried Madame Marteau, pulling her friend away from the window. "You will ruin us all, and your friend the sub-prefect into the bargain."

"Well, whatever you may say to the contrary, this young man doesn't look in the least like a murderer. He may be a rebel, but I don't care anything about his political opinions; and if you were the Aurélie de Saint-Amour of former days, we two would soon get him safely out of prison. He could make his escape to Paris, and I could conceal him in my house there."

"You big simpleton! Pray stop this nonsense, and remember you are not in a private house. Besides, your handsome black-bird has already been taken back to his cage."

"Are there any other prisoners?"

"A dozen, more or less; but they would not interest you. They are insurgents—all poor peasants, excepting their leader,"

"And who may he be?"



"He is a nobleman—Baron Adhémar de Mussidan."

"Why, I know him!" cried Coralie. "He used to live in Paris, and he was a great admirer of Clara Lasouree, a friend of mine. A handsome fellow he was, too, and spent money like a prince. He didn't trouble himself much about politics last year. He often came to the theatre at which I performed, and I have supped with him more than once."

"All the more reason why you shouldn't show yourself. He might recognise you, for the window of his cell is directly opposite this room."

"I have it. You don't want me to see him because you are in love with him yourself."

"In love with a man whom I have only seen through prison bars!" exclaimed Madame Marteau. "Do you think me as devoid of sense as yourself?"

"I think you must be bored to death here, and like to make the most of your opportunities. Oh, don't deny it. I know you, my dear. If I were in your place, I should have opened a correspondence with the handsome Adhémar long ago. You smile! So I am right, then. You throw kisses to each other, eh? and that husband of yours is as blind as a bat. I begin to think that prisons are not such gloomy places after all, and if I can help you in any way, you have only to let me know."

"Yes, and you would be guilty of some indiscretion that would ruin all three of us. I don't distrust you, but I have a very poor opinion of your prudence, and even if I had a liking for Monsieur de Mussidan, as you fancy, I would not admit it to you for you could not keep it to yourself."

"You misjudge me. A friend's secrets are sacred. Besides, if I remain here for two or three days, I shall know what to think; and seriously, my dear, you had better tell me how matters really stand between you and the baron, for if I am left in ignorance I may make some blunder in talking with your husband. For instance, if I hadn't already gained some inkling of the state of affairs, I might have told him that I had often met Monsieur de Mussidan in Paris."

"You had better not do that," said Madame Marteau, hastily. "He is quite capable of turning you out-of-doors, and telling the sub-prefect that you are well acquainted with one of the prisoners."

"That wouldn't suit me at all, I must admit. But what are the authorities going to do with poor Adhémar?"

"They talk of sending him to Cayenne; but I hope he will be spared the journey. He has influential friends. A relative of his, the Count de Sigoulès, who resides in the neighbourhood, is endeavouring to get him pardoned."

"Sigoulès! Ah! he's doubtless that angular old man, who cast sheep's-eyes at me when I was crossing the square, just before I met you."

"I shouldn't wonder. I had just left him."

"Charlie told me that this Count de Sigoulès was an enemy of the government."

"Yes, he is a strong Legitimist, and personally he can't do much for his cousin; but he is on very good terms with very influential persons in Paris. He was formerly a very great friend of General de Plancoët, and if he wrote to him, I am sure the pardon would be granted."

"Write to him yourself about it."

"Impossible! The general would wonder at my taking an interest in Monsieur de Mussidan. Besides, the baron will get out of the scrape without my assistance."

"Well I hope so," said Coralie. "But, come, tell me candidly : haven't you found a way to see him a little nearer than through the bars?"

Aurélié still hesitated. But she had had time to reflect, and had about come to the conclusion that she could not long conceal the truth from Coralie who slept so near by. "Well, yes," she replied, at last. "I go to see him occasionally."

"In the evening?"

"Of course. My husband goes to bed at ten o'clock, after making his evening round, and gets up again at three o'clock in the morning to make another."

"So while he is snoring you go to see Adhémar. But how do you manage it?"

"Why, Monsieur de Mussidan's cell communicates with a passage separated from my rooms by a door, of which I have a duplicate key. I took an impression of the lock and had a key made here. In this way I am able to get into this passage which my husband's subordinates never enter, for he distrusts them, and guards his more important prisoners himself."

"But how about the door of the cell?"

"It has no lock, it is fastened by bolts and bars as big as my wrist. I only have to draw them."

"But if your husband got up during the night?"

"Oh! he wouldn't come into my room, especially now that you sleep in the dressing-room. There, my dear, I have told you all, so now let us try to devise some way to spend the few days you will remain here in an agreeable manner."

"Quite so. I know a way."

"For myself, by way of amusement, I can only think of a few walks and some music. I will play you whatever you like."

"That will be delightful, but why shouldn't I, also, have a prisoner to console? Louis Chancelade's cell can't be far from the baron's."

"You are mistaken," said Madame Marteau, drily. "His cell is at the other end of the prison, not at all in the same passage as Monsieur de Mussidan's."

"Still, one can reach it all the same," retorted Coralie.

"You have no intention of paying him a visit, I hope?"

"Not alone, no. I shouldn't be able to find his cell, but there is nothing to prevent you from showing it to me."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Don't you remember that you promised me you would be prudent?"

"As prudent as you are. But you go to see Adhémar."

"That isn't the same thing."

"I fail to see the difference, except that Chancelade is dark, while Adhémar is fair. Tastes differ you know, my dear."

"But you are not acquainted with this Chancelade."

"I am sure that he is dying to know me."

"Because he saw you at the window?"

"Why, yes. Any one who falls in love with me at all, falls in love with me at first sight."

"That might be the case with a Parisian dandy, but this fellow is a savage."

"I will civilize him then."

"I doubt it very much. He only cares for politics, and he now expects to be condemned to death."

"I will promise to obtain his pardon"

"Why don't you arrange his escape while you are about it?"

"Well, if I only could—"

"You wouldn't hesitate, eh? and my husband would lose his place, and perhaps be accused of having been bribed to let his prisoner escape. If that's the way you intend to repay the service I have rendered you—"

"Come, come, my dear, don't get angry. You know that I wouldn't do anything to worry you. What I just said was only in fun. How could I release your husband's prisoners—I, who don't even know my way out of the place?"

"Let us change the subject, then. Besides, Pierre will be coming for supper."

"Only one question more. When are you going to see Adhémar?"

"This evening, perhaps. But why do you want to know?"

"Because if I heard your husband get up while you are away from your room I might warn you by lighting a candle. You could see the light from Adhémar's cell."

"You have a lively imagination I see, but never fear. Pierre sleeps soundly; and especially when he's tired like he must be to-day."

"So your interview is for to-night?"

"Yes," replied Madame Marteau.

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a servant bearing a lamp, for the dusk had fallen. The girl announced, at the same time, that M. Marteau had just ordered her to prepare supper two hours earlier than usual. Madame Marteau was somewhat worried at this change in the habits of the household. She feared that her husband might also change the hours of his nightly rounds.

He made his appearance soon afterwards, and seemed to be in a very bad humour, for he said abruptly to his wife:

"You will oblige me by not showing yourself at the window of this room until further orders."

"And why, my dear?" his wife gently asked. "What objection have you to my enjoying a little fresh air occasionally?"

"None whatever. And, up to the present time, I have never prevented you from doing so; but the investigating magistrate here is a fool; he has brought back the most absurd ideas from Bordeaux. All the magistrates want the prisoners treated like officers under arrest. The first order this one gave me was to allow Chancelade to walk about the court-yard twice a day, an hour on each occasion. And that is what he calls keeping a man in solitary confinement."

"But the poor fellow will take his walks alone. He can't communicate with anyone."

"You think so, do you? You forget that the Baron de Mussidan will see him from his window. It is a shame to have prisons built like this. If you think it an easy matter to keep an eye on the prisoners in this old barracks, you are greatly mistaken. What surprises me is that they have not all made their escape long before now. As for myself, they give me incessant worry; and upon my word! I'm half inclined to send in my resignation. I really can't lead this sort of life much longer."

"You know perfectly well that you won't be obliged to remain here for long. The general has not forgotten us, and when he hears about the report which the sub-prefect has just sent to the minister, he will obtain promotion for you."

"Nonsense! we are here for a year, at the very least. This accursed

department is in a state of constant revolt. Only last night the gendarmes were attacked on the road to Périgueux. Their quarter-master received a severe wound in the back. Several new arrests are to be made, and I shall have three or four rascals more to guard. And how can I be responsible for them with such assistance as I have, merely two under-keepers—two scoundrels who could easily be fuddled with a bottle of brandy? I can't stand this state of things any longer; I shall write to the minister of justice and ask him to take Mussidan and Chancelade off my hands as soon as possible."

The two ladies exchanged glances, and Coralie said, smilingly: "Excuse me, Monsieur Marteau, but does the restriction in regard to the window apply to me as well?"

"Take it for yourself, if you like," replied the chief warder, sulkily. "I have no right to give you any orders as you are only accountable to those who sent you here, but I certainly have a right to tell you that you won't find the suspicious characters you are to watch in this prison."

"In other words, my presence here annoys you, my dear cousin."

"No; for I hope and expect that you will spend most of your time elsewhere. But may the deuce take me if I can see how you are going to be of any service to the government. None of the families here will receive you."

"Monsieur Vignory will attend to all that."

"Oh! you may rely on that. In any case it is his business, and I never meddle with matters that don't concern me. Is supper ready?"

The servant who had now returned, replied affirmatively, and they passed into the dining-room. Pierre still looked savage, his wife seemed greatly pre-occupied, and Coralie became more gay and talkative than ever, for she was beginning to find the situation decidedly amusing. "My dear cousin," she remarked, "you have received me very cordially, and I am very grateful to you, but I fear that you have some doubts in regard to the importance of my mission. I will prove to you that you are mistaken; my giddy airs are indispensable for the success of my mission. No one will suspect a young woman who seems merely bent on enjoying herself. Monsieur Vignory understands this thoroughly, and on my return to Paris I shall speak about him to the minister in very flattering terms, and about yourself, of course; in the meantime, you won't refuse to give me the benefit of your advice. To which of the inhabitants of this town had I better devote my attention first of all?"

"They are all equally suspicious," growled Pierre; "and the officials are no better than the citizens. For instance, with the exception of the public prosecutor and his assessor, all the legal authorities support that fellow Chancelade on account of his sister."

"Ah!—he has a sister?"

"Yes; and she is a person you would do well to watch, whatever my wife may say to the contrary. I am sure that she is plotting to effect her brother's escape. She brought him some clothing to-day, and I am sorry that I gave it to him without subjecting it to careful examination. This girl has perhaps concealed a file among her brother's shirts. At all events you certainly ought to find out whether she is plotting."

"Suppose we talk of something else," remarked Anr lie, who had many reasons for desiring to change the subject. And thereupon she began to question her spurious cousin concerning their relatives, and they discoursed about so many uncles, aunts, and cousins whom Pierre knew nothing of,

for a very good reason, that he was reduced to silence, and when the dessert was served he asked Madame Minotte's permission to go and smoke his pipe in the clerk's office with his subordinates. Aurélie's spurious cousin at once replied that she intended to go to bed on leaving table, while Aurélie expressed her intention of doing the same, as she had a severe headache. Accordingly the husband bade them both good-night.

An hour later both the ladies had retired, but neither of them was asleep. Coralie had a plan of her own which she meant to carry out, and Aurélie was very desirous of keeping her appointment with M. de Mussidan. She was head-over-heels in love with him; and although she had not sacrificed her reputation to him, having lost it long previously, she had at least given him all her heart.

No sound having proceeded from the little room, which Coralie occupied, between the hours of nine and half-past eleven, Madame Marteau naturally concluded that her friend was fast asleep. She herself had been simply lying on her bed, and at a quarter to twelve, having put on a pair of slippers with felt soles which made little or no noise, she stole into the little sitting-room, and thence to the door of her husband's room at the end of a long passage. Here, she hesitated, and hearing him snore, she tiptoed back to the window of the sitting-room and drew the curtains apart. Lights were strictly forbidden in the prisoners' cells, and this privation greatly irritated Adhémar, who never ceased to inveigh against a measure that compelled him to spend fourteen hours out of the twenty-four in darkness. So it was not a signal that Aurélie was looking for, but she wished to satisfy herself that nothing unusual was going on in the court-yard. The moon had set, but the sky was cloudless, and the pale light of the stars enabled her to distinguish the bars of the opposite window. There was no sign of life in the wing in which Louis Chaneelade was confined, or in the yard, so Aurélie at last groped cautiously to the passage, opening and closing the door noiselessly behind her.

The passage was not lighted, as it should have been, and Pierre Marteau had more than once sworn about the stinginess of the authorities who seemed unwilling to furnish even lanterns and oil; but this was not the first time his wife had made a similar trip, and she did not hesitate for a moment. At a score of feet from the door the passage made a sharp turn, and the baron's cell was the first on the right hand after the corner was passed. Aurélie soon reached it, and as she peered through the peep-hole in the upper part of the door, the baron gallantly snatched a kiss. She then deftly removed the bars, slipped back the bolts, and glided into the cell, where Adhémar received her with open arms.

They both knew the value of time, and made the most of it. Several incidents of interest had occurred since their last interview, so that the conversation did not languish, though it was carried on in a low whisper. Having exhausted the lover's vocabulary they proceeded to converse on other subjects. "You have a visitor, have you not?" inquired the baron, between two kisses. "I thought I saw a rather pretty woman in your sitting-room this afternoon."

"Didn't you recognize her?" asked Aurélie.

"It seemed to me I had seen her somewhere before. She looked like a Parisienne, but I can't at all remember where I met her."

"You have often taken supper with her and a certain Clara Lasource, you bad fellow."

"Oh, I remember now. Her name must be Coralie."

"Exactly."

"She is a very amusing person ; but how did you happen to make her acquaintance ?"

"I knew her in Paris before my marriage. We were not in the same set, but I used to see her occasionally."

"But what is she doing here ?"

"It's quite a story. She knows Vignory, the sub-prefect, very intimately. He was a great admirer of hers when she was on the stage. So she thought it would be a good joke to come down and pay him a visit, and what should she do but dash up to the door of the sub-prefecture in a post-chaise. You can imagine the result. Poor Monsieur Vignory was nearly frightened to death. But it so happened that I had met her just before she reached the prefecture, and had a talk with her. She repeated our conversation to Vignory, who came to me, and implored me to pass her off as my cousin, and give her hospitality for a few days, whereupon thinking it a good joke, I consented."

"But how about your husband ?"

"He doesn't know much about my relatives, and he believes everything I tell him. Besides, the sub-prefect assured him that my cousin was a government emissary, and the bait took, especially as it was accompanied by a promise of promotion. I have taken Coralie into my confidence. She is a good girl, and takes great interest in you. In fact, she is already dreaming of securing your release."

"She is very kind, I am sure ; but I am in no hurry to leave. If I escaped, I would be unable to see you."

"How complimentary you are ! But I am not selfish, and I hope you will soon be set at liberty. The authorities in Paris are now considering your case, and, if necessary, I will write to the general."

"Many thanks ; but I prefer to await the good pleasure of the ministers. If I had any influential friends, I would rather recommend a worthy young fellow I saw walking about the court-yard to-day. What is he doing here ? He wasn't with us when we marched upon Salviac. Why has he been arrested ?"

"True. You don't know that the commissary-general was shot last night, and that that fellow Chancelade is accused of the crime."

"He ?" exclaimed M. de Mussidan, excitedly. "It isn't possible ! That young fellow is perfectly innocent. And yet the authorities are quite capable of condemning him. It shall not be."

"But how can one prevent it ?"

"By getting him away from here."

"I wish one could, but you know that it is impossible."

"Why ? I was able to get out of the prison, thanks to you."

"But you had sworn to return, and I knew that you would keep your oath. You did keep it, and returned an hour afterwards. But it was a miracle that you were not captured. I should have been ruined if you had been seen leaving or re-entering the prison by the window of my room facing the lanc. However, I knew that my husband was absent, and you were so anxious to destroy the list of the insurgents which you had buried near one of the trees on the esplanade, that I yielded, so as to prove to you how much I loved you."

"Well, give me yet another proof of your affection by setting Louis Chancelade free."

"But you are asking me to risk my very life. He wouldn't return, and

to-morrow when my husband discovered that his prisoner was missing, he would suspect that I assisted him, and would kill me."

"But why should he suspect you? You are the last person anyone would be likely to suspect."

"Well, even if the authorities did not accuse me, they would accuse him—"

"And he would lose his place? What of it? You can't make me believe that you want to be the wife of a jailer forever. The general will find Marteau another place in Paris, and if I am not sent to Cayenne, I shall meet you again there."

"But I don't even know this Chancelade. Why do you take such an interest in him?"

"Because he is innocent, as I said before. If he had been arrested on account of his political opinions, I should not ask you to interfere in his behalf, for he would get off with a short imprisonment like the others; but his life is at stake, and I don't want him to lose it on account of a crime he didn't commit."

"But how do you know that he didn't commit it? He was arrested immediately after the murder, whilst carrying a gun, which had just been fired off."

"I repeat that it was not he who killed the commissary. Will you believe me when I swear it?" added Adhémar, almost angrily.

"I believe you, and if his fate depended upon me, I would save him; but I can do nothing."

"You can surely do what you did yesterday. It will even be a less difficult task, as Chancelade won't return, so you won't have to wait for him, and throw him a rope."

"But I don't even know where his cell is," faltered Madame Marteau.

"I know where it is—in the wing perpendicular to this one. I have seen him at his window. One need only follow the passage, turn to the right, and there it is!"

"But the door is not secured by bars like yours. There is a padlock on it, at least my husband told me so."

"I don't believe it. Come with me."

"What, do you think of leaving your cell at the risk of being seen in the passage? No, you shall do nothing of the kind."

"Pooh! you only tremble for yourself. Well, I will go alone, if, as soon as I have opened the door of Chancelade's cell for him, you will promise to take him to your room, and let him leap from your window into the street."

"That might have been done yesterday, when Coralie wasn't here; but to-night she is sleeping in the dressing-room, and she would be sure to hear me."

"But you just told me that she was anxious to devise some means of effecting my release. You can tell her it is I."

"She wouldn't believe me, Adhémar. I entreat you not to ask impossibilities."

"Then you refuse to comply with my request?"

"I would gladly do as you wish, but I can't."

"Very well. It is getting late. Return to your apartments, and don't come here again."

"You send me away?"

"Yes, to prevent you from compromising yourself. I now know what I

shall do. I will save Chancelade without your assistance, as you desert me."

"How will you save him?"

"It will be an easy matter. I shall send for the investigating magistrate to-morrow, and tell him it was I who killed Santelli, that rascally Corsican."

"He won't believe you. You were in prison when the commissary was killed."

"I shall say that I was not."

"You will do nothing of the kind. No gentleman would denounce a woman."

"You will compel me to do it. When the life of an innocent man is at stake I cannot hesitate. Besides, your reputation sha'n't suffer. I shall say that you came to see me out of humanity, and that you yielded to my entreaties to allow me to absent myself for an hour in order to destroy the list of the insurgents. I shall say that this list was buried at the foot of one of the trees on the esplanade, only a few steps from the club-house; that the commissary and the sub-prefect passed me, without seeing me; and that, having recognised them, I was seized with an irresistible desire to kill the pitiless persecutor of the unfortunate peasants; that I went to the terrace, and from there—"

"They will say that you concocted all this, and that you could not have fired the shot, as you had no gun."

"I shall state where I procured the one I made use of."

Aurélié gave a start. "Is this true?" she faltered.

"True or not, it is what I am going to say."

"No one will believe that the Baron de Mussidan killed a defenceless man. Everyone knows that you are incapable of such a cowardly crime."

"In war a man kills his enemy when and where he can; and when a fellow has to deal with a ferocious animal, he lies in wait for him in the forest."

"But this commissary never did you any harm. He was not even in Salviac when you were arrested."

"That makes no difference. But let us put an end to this. It is useless for me to see Chancelade, as you refuse to let him escape by way of your window. Return to your own apartments, and forget that I exist. However, I bear you no ill-will."

"Hush, hush!" sobbed Madame Marteau, distracted at the thought of losing her lover; and flinging her arms about the baron's neck, and covering his face with passionate kisses, she added, "I love you, and I would risk anything to save your life."

"Then you consent?"

"To anything. Command, and I will obey."

"That is proper. You have a heart after all, and I will convince you some day that a kind act is always rewarded. But we mustn't lose a minute. Your friend is asleep, I suppose?"

"Yes; and Pierre also."

"Come, then. I might let you go alone, for I can trust you; but Chancelade, who doesn't know you, might think you were setting a trap for him in proposing flight. I must be at hand to explain the situation. After that, I will intrust him to your care. You must lock me up again in my cell, and then conduct him to your room, and open the window for him. He will require no further assistance after that."



"But what if he should be re-captured? Where can he find a safe place of concealment when once he is out of prison?"

"Don't trouble yourself about that. He will find plenty of hiding-places in the neighbourhood; besides, he won't remain in the country. His friends will furnish him with the means to go abroad. Come, I say."

Aurélié went out the first and Adhémar followed her. After cautiously replacing the bars, they stole along the passage, pausing every now and then to listen. The silence was profound. The clock had just struck one, and Madame Marteau began to think that the perilous undertaking would prove successful, after all. She did not believe that the baron had killed the commissary; but, given his habitual rashness, she believed him quite capable of accusing himself of the crime, and she was resolved to prevent this at any cost. Moreover, she was beginning to attach very little importance to the consequences of her conduct, and to feel proud of running some risk to please this handsome baron who held out a hope of meeting her in Paris hereafter. Suddenly, however, as she groped her way along, she heard someone in advance who was walking with a cat-like tread. Adhémar, also, had heard the sound, and he stopped short, and laid a warning hand on his companion's arm. If there was really someone in the passage, they could not escape by flight. It was better to pause and listen. They had reached the point where the passage turned sharply to the right, and the footsteps which had aroused their fears were no longer audible. Perhaps some spy was lying in wait for them round the corner; or, perhaps, it was someone hiding, in the hope of escaping them. Stepping past Aurélié, the baron at last slipped round the corner, and putting out his head, listened with breathless eagerness. Aurélié followed, clinging to him. The baron's ears were all attention, and at last he heard the sound of soft but hurried breathing, the breathing of a panting woman. This discovery reassured him, and, advancing a little further, he stretched out his right arm, whereupon his hand came in contact with a shoulder which he instantly caught hold of. "Mercy! don't hurt me," murmured a trembling voice.

Madame Marteau now darted forward in her turn. She had guessed who the culprit was, and she softly asked: "Is that you, Coralie?"

"Yes, save me."

M. de Mussidan understood the situation, and instantly resolved to profit by it. "Don't be alarmed," he said, kindly, supporting the spurious cousin who seemed nigh fainting. "You are in the hands of friends."

Coralie at once recognised the baron's voice. She had often heard him sing comic songs after supper in Paris. "How fortunate!" she murmured, heaving a sigh of relief. "I thought it was that old rascal, Marteau; and I was frightened to death."

"Serve you right," said Aurélié, "for it will teach you to stay quietly in bed. You promised me that you would not stir from your room."

"Yes, but I missed you, and I could not stand it any longer."

"But how did you reach this part of the prison? I locked the door leading into the passage behind me."

"No, you thought you locked it, but I only had to push it."

"All this is of no consequence," interrupted Adhémar, who was unwilling to waste any more precious time in explanations. "I will bet that you were going to visit the young man you saw yesterday in the yard?"

"Yes, I was; *you* won't venture to blame me I suppose."

"Would you like to save him?"

"Yes, indeed. What must I do—put on his clothes, give him mine, and lock myself up in his cell? I recollect reading a story something like that."

"Yes, the story of the Marquis de la Valette under the Restoration. But what you have to do is much more simple. You are merely to conduct him to Madame Marteau's room, open the window for him, and allow him to jump down into the street."

"But he will break his neck, and that would be a pity."

"He will do nothing of the kind. It is merely a drop of nine feet or so. He will land all right, and then you will see him rush away."

"Very good, nothing will please me better."

"Then we must waste no more time. Follow me, both of you."

They were but a short distance from the door of Chancelade's cell, and its occupant being wide awake, and having heard some voices, was standing with his ear near the peep-hole in the door. He was certainly greatly astonished when the baron removed the bars, drew back the bolts, opened the door, and whispered: "It is I! Adhémar de Mussidan. I have come to set you free."

"You, sir!" murmured Edmée's brother.

He was but little acquainted with the young nobleman, whom his father had joined in the insurrectionary movement two days after the *coup d'état*, and as their political opinions greatly differed, he certainly did not expect help from him.

"Yes, my dear fellow," replied Adhémar, "and it merely depends upon yourself to leave this prison to-night. Don't ask for any explanation. I have no time to give any. Only tell me if you can find any place of refuge when you are out of prison, for you can't hide yourself in your father's house."

"I shouldn't be safe there; besides, I might compromise my sister. I shall join a friend in the woods of Valade."

"The friend you mean is Jacques, my cousin Sigoulès' ex-gamekeeper, I suppose? All right. I am glad you have a safe hiding-place at your disposal, and by-and-bye, if I am set at liberty, I will do everything necessary to have your innocence established beyond a doubt. Now, come."

Chancelade at once left his cell. Adhémar closed the door after him, replaced the bars and bolts, took him by the arm, and led him along the corridor. The two women followed in silence. They reached Adhémar's cell, and once there the baron exclaimed: "My dear fellow, this is Madame Marteau, whose husband is chief warden of the prison, and this is Madame Marteau's cousin. I intrust you to their charge. Let them guide you, and do exactly what they tell you to do. Now, madame, I will re-enter my luxurious apartment. Will you have the kindness to bolt me in?" Thereupon, after shaking hands with Chancelade, the baron stepped inside his cell once more.

Madame Marteau had quite recovered her wonted coolness, and was now sincerely beginning to regret her part in this dangerous undertaking; but the die was cast, and she must go on promptly and resolutely to the end. They passed through the doorway at the end of the passage without mishap, and it was only necessary to ascend a few steps to reach Madame Marteau's sitting-room. "Pass on," said the jailer's pretty wife to Coralie, "and wait for me in my bedroom. I will be there in a moment." Coralie complied, and Madame Marteau, turning to Chancelade, then said: "Is it too much to ask you to promise me upon your word of honour that you will

never tell any one how you made your escape from this prison? You may be recaptured. Swear to me that you will be silent, whatever happens."

"I swear it, madame."

"Swear it by the life of your sister."

"You know her?" inquired Louis, surprised and a trifle shocked, to hear the jailer's wife speak of Edmée.

"Yes, I am glad to restore her brother to her. You will see her soon, I trust. Tell her what I have done for you—and don't forget that I have your promise. If you break it I shall be lost."

"You can trust me, madame; I never betrayed any one in my life."

Aurélié thereupon took his hand, and guided him to the bedroom, where they found Coralie ready to open the window. The jailer's wife bolted the door, and had just done so when she heard another door open. "Here comes my husband," she whispered, in terror.

"Oh, well, this gentleman can leap down into the street," replied Coralie.

"Marteau will arrive too late."

"No, the window of his room also overlooks the street, and he might take it into his head to look out. Step into the dressing-room, both of you. Even if he comes in here, he won't think of going any further."

Coralie was delighted to take a more active part in this handsome young fellow's escape, so she willingly led him into the dressing-room. Madame Marteau threw off her clothes in the twinkling of an eye, and sprung into bed. It was time she did so, for the floor of the sitting-room was already creaking under her husband's heavy tread. He was no doubt about to make his nightly round, although it was not yet two o'clock. A moment later he tapped at the bedroom door, and asked in a low voice: "Aurélié, are you asleep?"

She realised that if she did not reply, he would surely renew his inquiry, and that it was best for her to present a bold front to the enemy. So springing out of bed, she drew back the bolt, partially opened the door, and beheld her husband standing outside, with a dark-lantern in his hand. "What is the matter, my dear?" she inquired, yawning like a person still half asleep.

"I have a word or two to say to you."

"Say it quickly then. I am half frozen."

"Well, I have been warned that an attempt to free the prisoners will be made to-night by the insurgents. I don't believe a word of it, but I have taken my precautions. If the rebels come, they will meet with a warm reception; so if you hear any noise, don't be frightened, but do your best to reassure Madame Minotte. Remain in your own room, whatever happens. I am going to see if my birds are still in their cages. Good-night." So saying, Pierre Marteau walked quietly away.

His wife hastily closed the door, and darted into the adjoining dressing-room. Coralie, left alone with Louis, had engaged in whispered converse with him. She had declared that she had initiated the plan for his escape, having seen him in the courtyard that afternoon; whereupon Louis expressed his gratitude, and Coralie added: "You must come and see me when you are free."

"But I should be arrested if I showed myself in Salviac," he replied.

"Oh! I sha'n't stay here," was her response. "My name is Coralie Bernache, and I live in Paris, at No. 19 Rue Mogador. You must come and see me there, and now, before we part, let me give you a kiss."

She had just pressed her lips upon the astonished young fellow's mouth,

when Aurélie darted into the room. "My husband has his suspicions!" she whispered hurriedly. "You haven't a moment to lose."

Chancelade asked no better than to escape both from the prison and the forward embraces of the fair damsel with whom he had momentarily found himself. He rose up while Aurélie cautiously opened the window, leaned out, and satisfied herself that there was no one in the lane. "The way is clear. Go!" she said.

"Thanks!" replied Edmée's brother, extending a hand to each of his benefactresses. Then after springing lightly over the window-sill, he clung to it for a moment, measuring the distance that separated him from the ground, and finally released his hold.

"Heaven grant that he hasn't broken his neck!" murmured Coralie, anxiously.

"No," replied Aurélie, glancing out. "He is running up the lane. Ah! he is out of sight now! He has reached the open fields, and he is safe." Thereupon the jailer's pretty wife hastily closed the window.

"You will now do me the favour to go back to bed, and stay there until to-morrow morning," she added, drily, to Coralie. "You very narrowly escaped ruining us all. Whenever you may feel inclined to start for Paris, I sha'n't attempt to detain you."

"You are angry with me. You certainly have no reason to be so. All's well that ends well."

"You think the affair ended? You will find out your mistake to-morrow morning, when my husband discovers that his prisoner has escaped."

"Oh! I don't care for him. But I must say that your conduct is incomprehensible. Why didn't you allow Mussidan to escape, too, while you were about it?"

"That is none of your business."

"I can guess, however. You know that he is in no danger, so you prefer to keep him here for your own amusement."

Aurélie was about to make a tart reply, when a discharge of firearms interrupted her. "They are firing!" she exclaimed.

"Upon my Adonis," cried Coralie. "They have killed him, the brutes! If it is that boor of a Marteau, he shall pay dearly for it."

"The shot was fired in the court-yard, so it couldn't have been aimed at Chancelade."

"At whom was it aimed then?"

"How can I tell? At Adhémar, perhaps."

"Impossible! He is in his cell, and unless your husband has gone there to blow his brains out—"

Aurélie had already darted to the sitting-room window in order to ascertain what was going on. Coralie followed, although they dared not open the window for fear of attracting the attention of Pierre Marteau, who was talking excitedly with one of his subordinates. They saw the latter still holding a weapon which he had just fired, and pointing to the roof of the wing in which Louis Chancelade had been confined. This seemed to indicate that the shot had been fired at some one seen upon the roof, who could only have climbed it with one object in view. Soon, another keeper came running up, also armed with a musket, and the two women saw Marteau give an order, and point towards the gate of the prison; whereupon the two men rushed off. "He has sent them out to bring in the body of the man they have killed!" murmured Coralie.

"It must have been one of Chancelade's friends who came here to try and release him," replied Aurélie.

"However, he was less successful than we were. Gracions ! won't your husband be in a rage when he discovers that his prisoner is gone ? If you take my advice, my dear, you'll go to bed, and pretend to be asleep, as I intend to do."

The advice was very suitable ; and Anrélie followed it. Martean, interrupted in his nightly round by this alarming incident, had resolved to lose no time in satisfying himself as to the safety of his more important prisoners ; and so leaving his subordinates the task of finding or pursuing the would-be intruder, he hastened into the prison. The first cell he entered was that of the Baron de Mussidan. He opened it abruptly, and found Adhémar standing near the window. "What are you doing there?" he cried, savagely.

"I am looking out, as you can see for yourself," sneered the prisoner. "It seems you are beginning to shoot prisoners in the yard, at night-time, just like the Duc d'Enghien was shot at Vincennes, and I am anxious to see the sight, as my time will come soon, I suppose."

The jailer, fairly enraged by this language, slammed the door, locked it, and hastened on to Chancelade's cell. This time he began by calling his prisoner through the peep-hole in the door. Of course, he received no reply, but his anxiety was greatly relieved by the discovery that the bars and the bolts were all in place. "You are asleep, you scoundrel !" he muttered. "Wait a minute, and I will rouse you, you may be sure."

He thereupon drew back the bolts and entered the cell ; as he did so he uttered a cry of surprise. The cell was empty. He overturned the camp-bed and pried with his lantern into every corner, but without finding any one. He then repaired to the window, the glass and bars of which proved to be intact. Seized with rage, and losing his wits completely, he finally rushed out into the corridor like a madman, yelling : "Stop him ! Kill him like a dog !"

Mussidan, who was prepared for the explosion, was peering into the passage through the peep-hole in the door of his cell, and could not deny himself the pleasure of asking with a sneer : "What are you after, my dear Mousieur Marteau ? Is it possible that one of your prisoners has escaped ?"

But the chief-warder was already in the court-yard, where he found his two assistants who had just returned from a fruitless search. "I am sure that I hit him, however," said the one who had fired the shot. "There is some blood at the foot of the wall."

"He climbed the roof and descended from it by clinging to the water-spout," remarked the other. "I only know one man in this neighbourhood who is capable of such a feat."

"Silence, you rascals !" roared Martean. "Chancelade has escaped ! Someone opened the door for him. Oh, your account is settled !" And as they attempted to protest their innocence, he thundered : "Be off with you now ! you to the gendarmerie barracks, and you to the sub-prefecture. Wake them all up, and bring them here. I will wait for them in the office. And tell them to make haste, or I shall do something desperate."

He shouted so loud that his words reached the ears of the two guilty women, and made them tremble in their beds.

## V.

On the morning following this eventful night all Salviae was in an uproar. The town's-folk stopped to question one another in the streets, and the public squares were crowded. No one knew anything for certain, but there were rumours that a party of armed men had attempted to release the prisoners. The people residing in the immediate neighbourhood of the prison pretended they had heard a fusillade, and those who had rushed to their windows had seen the gendarmes leave the barraeks on their way to the jail, whither the sub-prefect and the public prosecutor subsequently repaired. As for the authorities, they were in a state of consternation. Hastily aroused in the middle of the night, they had hurried to the prison without knowing what was really the matter, and when Pierre Marteau told them of Chancelade's escape, they at first refused to believe it; but it was necessary to surrender to evidence, and the public prosecutor soon began to suspect the head-jailer of complicity in the affair. This functionary did not believe in miracles, and as the door and window of the cell were intact, he felt sure that Chancelade could not have escaped by the roof. Consequently some person must have conducted him to the street, and that person must necessarily have been one of the inmates of the prison.

The sub-prefect felt obliged to undertake Pierre Marteau's defence. He tried to turn suspicion on M. de Mussidan, who had been allowed to receive messages, and even letters, from outside, so that he might easily have planned an escape with the help of confederates; and, moreover, M. Vignory called attention to the fact that one of the keepers had wounded a man perched upon the roof, and that this man had not climbed there without an object. His arguments were but moderately successful, however. All he could obtain was permission to question Mussidan, whose answers proved extremely insolent. He pretended that he had seen and heard nothing, and bitterly complained that his slumbers had been disturbed, concluding by asking the public prosecutor if he were paid to prevent honest people from sleeping. M. Bizouin, the assessor, increased the sub-prefect's discomfiture by proposing that they should hear the testimony of Madame Marteau and the relative who was enjoying her hospitality. Marteau had to summon the two women, who, however, had had plenty of time to prepare for this anticipated examination. Aurélie gave her testimony with admirable coolness, and without the slightest reluctance; but Coralie manifested intense indignation. She declared that she could not understand why she should be troubled about the matter, that she had nothing whatever to do with guarding the prisoners, and she gave the gentlemen to understand that she should report to certain high and mighty personages the annoyance to which she had been subjected.

The conference finally ended by the prosecutor ordering all the gendarmes to start in pursuit of Louis Chancelade, and on the supposition that he could have only taken refuge at his sister's or with the Count de Sigoulès, the residence of each of the latter was to be searched without delay.

After the departure of the officials there was very little sleeping at the prison. Pierre Marteau, openly censured and threatened with dismissal, had a stormy interview with his wife and her pretended cousin, but Aurélie scorned to vindicate herself, and Coralie signified her intention of immedi-

ately leaving for Paris to complain of the way in which she had been treated, and which quite prevented her from carrying out her mission.

Such was the state of affairs while the town's-folk anxiously asked themselves what had happened, and while the local commissary of police betook himself to Edmée's house, armed with a search-warrant. Her brother had not returned home, and Jacques had left no trace of his presence there; but she learned from the commissary that Louis had escaped, and that an unknown person had been wounded while attempting to release the prisoner. She believed that the wounded man was Jacques, and this thought marred the joy that the news of the escape would otherwise have caused her. After some reflection, she decided to consult her neighbour, M. Braconne, who approved of her resolve to keep perfectly quiet for the time being, but who blamed Chancelade for having fled, instead of waiting for the jury to acquit him. He confessed to Edmée that he had seen Jacques enter her house on the day before, and deplored the inopportune interference of the young poacher, who, in his opinion, was responsible for the escape of M. Marteau's prisoner.

The Count de Sigoulès was likewise apprised of the escape that same morning, for the lieutenant in command of the Salviac gendarmes appeared at the château on horseback at the head of four men, and, as an officer, was courteously received by the old nobleman. M. de Sigoulès offered to show him all over the manor-house and the farm, as he was sure that no one had taken refuge there; and when he learned that the gendarmes were not looking for his cousin, Mussidan, but for Chancelade, the supposed murderer of the commissary-general, he distinctly declared that he would have shut the doors in his face if he had dared to seek a shelter there.

The lieutenant and his men consequently returned empty-handed, and on reaching Salviac they found the authorities more excited than ever. The public prosecution office was sending out messengers in every direction; the sub-prefect was shut up in his private room, vainly seeking a means to avert the storm which would surely burst upon his head if the prisoner were not found, and cursing Marteau, his wife, and, above all, Coralie, whom he suspected of being the cause of the whole trouble. Inside the prison, the state of affairs was still worse. The domestic dissensions had so increased in violence that Madame Marteau had threatened her husband with General de Plancoët's anger; the jailer had retaliated by some very uncomplimentary allusions to Aurélie de Saint-Amour's past life; and Coralie boldly told them that neither of them was any better than the other, and that she hoped she should never set eyes on them again.

Thereupon, having burned her ships, as it were, she resolved to leave the town that very day without saying a word to any one. Her trunks had not yet arrived, but she felt sure that Vignory would send them back to Paris as soon as they came to hand; so the only difficulty she had to contend with was to find some means of personal transport. Although she was but little acquainted with the town, she started out at about noon, feeling confident that she would be able to find a livery stable without attracting much attention. She crossed the square, and reached the high street, without any unpleasant incident, and had been proceeding along it for five minutes or so, when she perceived that some one was following her. She did not need to turn and look round to feel sure that it was a gentleman; she had often been followed in Paris, and being thoroughly versed in the tactics to which women resort in such cases, she crossed the street. The person who was following her did the same. Thereupon she slackened her pace to allow

him to pass her ; but he also slackened his, whilst, when she walked on more rapidly, he suited his pace to hers. At last, however, she perceived a sign upon which an untutored artist had depicted a yellow carriage drawn by two chocolate-coloured horses, and she thought to herself : "This is what I want. I have only to find the jobmaster. He must be somewhere about."

She had for a moment forgotten her follower, who now came up, bowing politely, and inquired, with a courteous air : "Are you looking for a carriage, madame?"

She eyed him keenly before replying, and saw that he was young, tolerably good-looking, and not badly dressed for a provincial. "Yes," she replied, "but I think I shall find one here."

"The jobmaster lives at the other end of the alley, and you couldn't get there without soiling your shoes. Will you allow me to call him for you?"

Coralie hesitated for an instant, but this obliging young man had quite a respectable air, and, besides, she never scrupled to accept a favour from any one. "Gladly," she replied, "and I thank you in advance, for you will save me a disagreeable tramp."

"I can easily send a carriage to the hotel where you are staying, at any hour you may be pleased to mention."

"I am not staying at the hotel, and I wish to leave the town immediately."

"That will be an easy matter, and if you will tell me where you are going, I can settle the terms with the stable-keeper, who will bring the vehicle here. I must warn you, however, that the best trap he has is a very shabby affair."

"I am going to Paris."

"Not by carriage, I suppose," said the young man, laughing.

"Nothing would please me better, but the horse would die on the way. I only wish to reach the nearest railway station."

"That is Châteauroux—quite a distance off."

"I know that very well, for I made the journey only yesterday in an uncomfortable brougham—" Scarcely had Coralie said this than she regretted it, for she saw by the gentleman's face that he knew the story of her arrival at Salviac. However, she had gone too far to retreat ; besides, she cared very little if this new acquaintance did tell his compatriots that the strange lady had returned to Paris. She had no fears that Vignory would send the gendarmes after her. He would be only too glad to get rid of her.

"You can go in two short stages to Limoges, where you will find a good diligence to take you to Châteauroux," said the young fellow.

"Very well. Where shall I spend the night?"

"At Chalus, which is a large town ; you will find a very fair inn there. You will arrive there before dark, for though this man has very wretched carriages, he has some good horses."

"Chalus !" repeated Coralie. "It seems to me that I do remember passing through a town of that name. And from Chalus I must go to Limoges, I presume," she added.

"You will get there in a few hours, madame."

"And from Limoges, I can post to Châteauroux, and reach Paris on the day after to-morrow. As to the price I may have to pay the stable-keeper, that is of no consequence ; and as you are kind enough to make the necessary arrangements, I give you *carte blanche*, on condition that I leave Salviac immediately."



"The carriage will be here in five minutes, madame, and you will only have to step into it," replied the gentleman, darting down the alley.

Coralie was in ecstasies. She could leave this detestable town without delay. After spending a few minutes looking at the shops, where some rough shoes and some antediluvian hats were exhibited for sale, she saw the young man reappear, leading a tolerably good-looking horse harnessed to a kind of four-wheel cabriolet. "The vehicle isn't elegant," he remarked; "but I know the horse. He can travel seven miles an hour easily, and if you don't fear the cold—"

"I am equipped for a journey across Siberia," replied Mademoiselle Bernache, pointing to the fur-lined mantle that enveloped her, and to the heavy shawl upon her arm. "However," she added, "I don't see the driver."

"All the coachmen are out just now, but if you will allow me, I will drive you, madame."

"You, sir! Why, I do not know you."

"I am aware of that, madame, and I will take the liberty of introducing myself to you. My name is Martial Mouleydier; my family, I am proud to say, is one of the oldest and best known in Salviac, and I might refer you to the sub-prefect, who is one of my particular friends, for credentials as to my character and social position."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, madame; I have the honour of seeing Monsieur Vignory almost every day—the honour and the pleasure—for he is a very agreeable man, and I greatly enjoy talking with him about the capital."

"Which he knows thoroughly well, and you also, I presume."

"No, madame; but I hope to go there soon."

Coralie felt a strong desire to laugh. This young fellow, who had never left his native town, seemed supremely ridiculous to her; and she was already thinking how she might astonish him by some highly exaggerated descriptions of Parisian life. "Well, sir," she said, with a very dignified air, "I am greatly obliged to you for your offer, but it is quite out of the question. For me to travel alone with you isn't to be thought of."

"You would have travelled alone with the coachman."

"That is very different. A coachman is only a coachman; while you—"

"I am, and shall remain your most respectful servant," replied Mouleydier, greatly flattered, and evidently hopeful. "I shall consider myself extremely fortunate if I can obtain your permission to drive you to Chalus; and I shall return to Salviac this evening, providing you have no further need of my services."

"Upon that condition, I will accept your offer, sir," she answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"May I venture to suggest, then, that you should step into the vehicle without delay? It is growing late, and I am anxious to get you to Chalus before night-time; it is likely to be very cold at dusk."

She consented. He assisted her into the carriage, seated himself beside her, and after gathering up the reins in his left hand, he struck the horse a stinging blow with the whip handle, which sent him flying along the high street. "One would think you were eloping with me," remarked Coralie, smiling.

"I wish that were indeed the case," rejoined the gallant Martial, delighted with this beginning.

"I am a much more important and serious-minded person than you suppose," continued Mademoiselle Bernache. "I came to Salviac, charged with a political mission, and I am only leaving because this mission has proved futile."

"The minister sent you to Monsieur Vignory, probably."

"Yes; but, of course, I could not stay at the sub-prefecture, so I accepted the hospitality of a relative, a lady, whose husband is chief-warder of the prison."

"The pretty Madame Marteau? Then I suppose she pointed out to you the commissary's murderer, a young man named Chancelade? It was I who effected his arrest."

On hearing this announcement, Coralie gave a violent start, and for an instant felt inclined to jump out of the carriage, rather than remain in the company of a man who had not only caused the arrest of the handsome Chancelade, but also boasted of it. However, she controlled herself, and soon resolved to profit by this opportunity to secure some valuable information. "What, sir!" she exclaimed, "so it is to you that the government is indebted for the capture of that brigand? He is said to be a very dangerous character, and you, no doubt, endangered your life in arresting him."

"I should have imperilled it, of course, had it been necessary," said Mouleydier, straightening himself up, complacently; "but the arrest was very easily managed. I happened to be at the club when the commissary was shot. The sub-prefect started out in pursuit of the murderer; I accompanied him, as it was my duty to do, since I also have the honour to be an official. However, the man escaped us; but I had an idea that he must have taken refuge in his sister's house, so I conducted Monsieur Vignory there, and we surprised the culprit just as he returned home."

"You deserve great credit, sir, and no doubt the government will reward you for your gallant conduct. I shall mention it to the minister."

"Ah, madame, if you would condescend to do that, my fortune would be assured," exclaimed young Mouleydier, artlessly.

"Ah! you rascal," thought Coralie, "you denounced that handsome fellow, did you? Well, you shall pay for it." And she began zealously racking her brain trying to think what trick she could play her companion to pay him for the dastardly act he had committed. She heartily wished she might meet Chancelade and hand the traitor over to him, and ask him to thrash him within an inch of his life; but not anticipating such a piece of good luck, she mentally resolved to do her worst unassisted.

They had soon left the town, and the vehicle now rolled along a hilly, lonely road. To the right and left there were copses of chestnut trees, with stretches of heath dotted here and there with furze. However, Coralie paid little or no attention to the landscape. She was plotting vengeance against Louis Chancelade's enemies. "Yes," she resumed at last, "you have certainly won your spurs by the capture of that dangerous criminal. It is no fault of yours if he escaped last night."

"The report that circulated through the town this morning is true, then? I did not believe it."

"Quite true, unfortunately."

"The deuce! Then the chief-warder is in a nice fix; and I am afraid that Monsieur Vignory will be greatly blamed also, for the warder is under his orders, and the prison must have been very badly guarded. However, if Chancelade managed to get out, some one must have opened the door for

him. Some of his political friends, probably. He will be recaptured unquestionably, for he hasn't had time to go far, and all the gendarmes must have been sent out in pursuit of him. Besides, a description of his person will be circulated everywhere, and his appearance alone would cause him to be regarded with suspicion. He has the face of a brigand."

"Fool!" muttered Coralie.

"I beg your pardon?" queried Mouleydier, who thought he had misunderstood her.

"Oh, nothing! I was thinking of that fool of a jailer who, no doubt, forgot to lock his doors. When do you expect to visit Paris, my dear sir?"

"In about three months from now, I hope; and if you will allow me to call on you—"

"I will. I can't introduce you to my husband—as I am a widow—but you will perhaps meet your friend, Vignory, at my house, for I greatly fear that he will be recalled in consequence of this unfortunate affair."

"Yes, I am very much afraid that he will lose his place; and if that misfortune befalls him, I shall lose all chance of exceptional promotion, for I relied mainly on him."

"You won't lack protectors. I myself will find you one."

"If you do that, madame, I swear that you will not find me ungrateful."

"Don't mention it," said Coralie. "Let us return to the present. You did not exaggerate this horse's qualities. He certainly goes very fast, and we must have covered a long distance by this time."

"Nearly ten miles, and all the way uphill. When we reach the top of that slope yonder, we shall have reached the highest point in our journey, and all the rest of the way to Chalus will be down-hill."

"Your part of the country isn't particularly cheerful in its aspect, especially in the winter-time—nothing but snow, snow, everywhere, with a few dwarfed, distorted trees, and clumps of shrubbery, but not a living being. It seems to me that it would be an easy matter for Chancelade to hide himself in these solitary wilds."

"He would perish of cold—that is, unless he could burrow like a fox. There are two or three caves near the Rolling Rock, but the gendarmes know them, and they would smoke him out, like the wild beast that he is."

Coralie felt a strong desire to scratch young Mouleydier's eyes out, but she contented herself with inquiring, calmly: "What is the Rolling Rock?"

"One of the curiosities of the neighbourhood—a large rock balanced upon the point of another block of stone. It weighs, I don't know how many tons, and yet a child can rock it to and fro. I will point it out to you as we pass by. We can see it from the road."

"It must be very interesting."

"Yes, to strangers. But I should greatly prefer to see the Boulevard des Italiens, or the masquerade balls at the Paris opera-house, especially if you would condescend to let me accompany you there."

"I will reserve a seat for you in my box—where I receive only my particular friends."

"Oh, madame, you overpower me," said Mouleydier, delighted at the prospect.

"We shall talk about Salviac, and our drive in this primitive conveyance."

"I shall never forget this delightful drive, I assure you; I wish it could last forever."

"I can't say that I do. I am black and blue already."

"Forgive my selfishness. I can only think of my great good fortune. But I fear that our little town has not impressed you very favourably."

"Not particularly, I must admit, though I should not have minded spending a few days there, if I had not been re-called to Paris. In fact, I should have been delighted to make the acquaintance of some of the fair ladies of Salviac. The sub-prefect intended to hold a reception for the purpose of introducing them to me."

"You would not have seen any one comparable with yourself in beauty or elegance."

"That is an undeserved compliment, I am sure. Madame Marteau told me there was a wonderfully beautiful young girl whose Christian name was Edmée, I believe."

"Yes, she's the sister of Chancelade, the murderer."

"Is it possible?"

"And the daughter of an old fanatic who played a prominent part in the recent insurrection, and who has just been sent to Cayenne. She is pretty, it's true, but she is quite without style, and dresses like a common peasant woman."

"Poor girl! she must be heart-broken to lose her father and her brother at the same time."

"You pity her!"

"Yes. I must admit it. I think I shall even say a good word for her to the minister. I am sure he will do something for her."

"But she needs nothing. Although the Chancelade family isn't wealthy, it is comfortably off; and the government would do well to reserve its bounty for more deserving persons, especially as this young girl shares the opinions of her relatives."

"All the more reason for us to try and convert her. But here we are at the top of the hill. Suppose we let the horse stop and rest a moment?"

"It would be advisable; he's a little bit blown by the ascent, and with a rest he will go all the better by-and-bye, and take us to Chalus right away."

"Well, while we stop, if you wish to oblige me, you will go and gather me a bunch of that beautiful heather on the rock to the right of the road. I should like to take it home with me, as a souvenir of Périgord and our drive."

These last words had hardly passed Coralie's lips before the delighted clerk sprang out of the vehicle, and hastened towards the rock she had indicated.

"I have you now, young man!" muttered Coralie.

"Not that, the best is up higher, still higher!" she cried, seeing him pause to cull some dry heather near the base.

While speaking she had stealthily gathered up the reins which he had fastened to the splash board, and when she saw him at the summit of the rock, which it was even more difficult to descend than to climb, she seized hold of the whip and gave a good lash to the horse, who started off at a fast trot.

"Don't be afraid, madame; he will stop if you pull him in," cried Martial from the top of the rock.

"Idiot!" thought Coralie, "he really fancies that the horse is running away. See if he stops this side of Chalus. You'll have to go home on foot,

young fellow ! This will teach yon a lesson. Denounce Louis Chancelade again, will yon ! I'd like to serve several others in the same way."

The horse had good blood in his veins, and he flew down the hill. It is true, however, that Coralie had strong arms, and she held the reins tightly. The descent extended over a distance of a mile and a half, so that the vehicle soon distanced Mouleydier, who was running after it, blowing hard with his bunch of heather in his hand. There was a long stretch of level road at the foot of the hill and on reaching it, the horse did not slacken his pace in the least, but flew swiftly along without the slightest urging. After about ten minutes' rapid progress, Coralie Bernache turned to look behind her, and had the gratification of seeing that the gallant clerk seemed but a tiny black speck, far off upon the hillside.

She laughed heartily at the trick she had just played upon Louis Chancelade's enemy, and congratulated herself upon having found this clever way of leaving Salviac without any one's knowledge. Perhaps no one would ever know the route she had taken, for it was not likely that Martial would tell his friends of his adventure. She took a malicious pleasure in picturing him, plodding back homeward, and compelled to pay the jobmaster the value of the missing horse and carriage, or at least to hand him a sum of money to be held as security until they were recovered. However, Coralie had no intention of keeping or selling them, for, thanks to her admirer, the Russian prince, now away at St. Petersburg, she had plenty of ready money at her disposal.

She said to herself : "On reaching Chalus I will hand this old rattle-trap over to the keeper of the inn I stop at, and give him two louis, on conditions he sends it back to Salviac by one of his stable-boys. To-morrow morning he can supply me with another vehicle to take me to Limoges, and once there, I shall have no further trouble."

She did not ask herself if, in a town still smaller than Salviac, the people would not be astonished to see a woman drive up quite alone in this style ; nor did she foresee the possibility of losing her way. A true Parisienne, having seldom gone beyond the limits of the capital, she was convinced that all roads led to Rome ; that the horse had only to go straight on to take her to Chalus, and that she should soon see, on the horizon, the towers of the old château, famous for the death of Richard Cœur de Lion, and which she had previously noticed on her way to Salviac.

The landscape had now changed in aspect, but had become still more desolate. Instead of low hills, crowned with chestnuts, she now saw on either side of the road some barren fields strewn with large granite boulders, which seemed to have been sown there by a giant's hand. The sky was grey and heavy. There was snow in the air, and the atmosphere had grown still more chilly. Coralie had been obliged to take her hands out of her muff in order to drive, and they soon began to ache with the cold. She had no idea how much longer it would take her to reach the inn, where she expected to warm herself before a good fire. It seemed to her that Mouleydier had said something about a drive of a few hours' duration, and at least two hours had elapsed since her departure from Salviac. However, the sun sets early in January, and the prospect of being overtaken by darkness on the road was far from pleasant. What should she do ? It was too late to beat a retreat now ; besides, nothing in the world could have induced her to return to Salviac. She was considerably surprised at the entire absence of vehicles and pedestrians. One would have fancied that this barren region was utterly uninhabited. In fact, there did not seem to

be sufficient vegetation to sustain cattle, and water was as scarce as pasturage. To complete Coralie's discomfiture, the horse was beginning to show unmistakeable signs of fatigue. He had slackened his pace considerably, and Mademoiselle Bernache was now obliged to let him proceed at a slow trot.

"No matter!" she said, to console herself, "I am sure that simpleton can't overtake me, and even at this rate I must soon reach my destination. When I reach the next hill, I will get out and walk a bit to warm myself, and when we reach the top I'll give the horse a few minutes to breathe. He can certainly go four or five miles further; and even if he gives out altogether when I reach Chalus, I shall get off with the payment of four or five hundred francs. The animal is certainly not worth more than that!"

Unfortunately, the desired hill did not make its appearance; on the contrary, a level road stretched before her extending as far as the eye could reach—a road bordered on either side by stunted trees and granite rocks. She drove on and on, absorbed in thinking of her trip to Saviac, and her reverie was only brought to a close by the horse suddenly stopping short. Coralie soon understood why. The road forked, and the animal did not know which direction to take. She herself was equally at a loss. She was not very proficient in geography, and did not know whether Chalus lay in an easterly or westerly direction. There was no guide-post or any person to whom she could apply for information, nor was there within sight any farm or cottage at which she might make inquiries.

She was vainly endeavouring to decide which direction she should take, when to her great surprise she saw a child's head rise above the embankment that bordered the left side of the road. Soon the urchin's whole body became visible, and she perceived that he was a ragged peasant lad—a shepherd-boy, probably, though she saw no sign of any flock. She called him, but he did not move a muscle, and losing patience, she drove her horse up to the edge of the ditch, at the side of the road, and hastily alighted. The child did not run away, but he did not advance, and when Coralie called to him again, he replied in a local dialect which was utterly incomprehensible to her. "Idiot!" she muttered, savagely. Then, controlling herself, she called out: "Which of these two roads must I take, to reach Chalus? If you will tell me, I will give you twenty sous."

The boy made signs that he did not understand her, though he had very bright and intelligent eyes. Coralie thereupon drew some silver coins from her pocket, and spread them out upon the palm of her gloved hand. This time the boy seemed to know what she meant. His eyes brightened, and he beckoned his questioner to approach. Coralie at once sprang over the ditch, firmly resolved to catch the boy by the ear, drag him to the spot where the two roads met, and point to them, repeating the word—Chalus. The horse seemed too tired to run away, and, as he began to nibble at the dry grass on the roadside, there did not seem to be any danger in leaving him untied. The child retreated a little when he saw Coralie jump out of the vehicle. He seemed determined not to come within her reach, and it would be useless to think of overtaking him if he attempted to run away; so, concluding that it was best to try to conciliate him, Coralie said, chinking the silver she still held in her hand: "All this is yours, if you will show me my way."

The lad pointed to a pile of rocks on the heath, about a hundred yards from the embankment up which Coralie had now climbed, and beckoned her to follow him. Thinking that there might be a road behind these

rocks she walked quietly in the direction indicated by the child, who was leaping with delight. Beyond the bank the ground sloped down rapidly from the road-side, so that Coralie soon lost sight of the horse and vehicle; but she did not fear that any one would appropriate them there, on that deserted road. The rocks formed several irregular piles, and the first which presented itself consisted of two immense blocks of stone poised one above the other. The child ran straight to them, and began to climb the topmost rock with wonderful agility. "Good!" said Coralie to herself; "one can probably see the church-tower of Chalus from there, and he wants to show it to me. These barbarians have strange ideas. He probably fancies that I also can climb up there."

Her astonishment changed to stupefaction, however, when she saw the lad begin to dance on the nearly level top of the upper rock, thus making it sway slowly but perceptibly to and fro. Coralie was wondering why he indulged in this singular exercise, when she suddenly recollected the information that Mouleydier had so kindly furnished concerning the natural curiosities of the district. "It is the Rolling Rock!" she murmured. "The little beggar thought I wanted to see it move, and that I was offering him money to show it to me. He is less stupid than I supposed. I will pay him, so as to encourage him, and after that, he will certainly show me the road to Chalus." So she called out to him: "That is fine, very fine, my boy! It is almost as nice as the swings at the fair of Saint-Cloud. But come down, and let me give you your money."

As she suited the action to the word, the child sprang nimbly from the rock, and held out his hand. She dropped the money into it, but he no sooner had it in his possession, than he darted off as fast as his legs could carry him, and without giving her time to say a single word. Encumbered with wraps as she was, it was impossible for her to pursue him with any chance of success. Indeed he was soon out of sight. "What a fool I was to give him the money!" exclaimed Coralie. "I might have known that he would desert me as soon as I paid him. How I am going to get out of this dilemma I can't imagine. Upon my word! I think I shall leave it to the horse. He knows the way, perhaps, and may take me where I wish to go; after all, if he makes a mistake, we shall be sure to turn up somewhere."

She was about to return to the spot where she had left the vehicle, when she suddenly recollected that young Mouleydier had said that Chancelade might have concealed himself in the caves near the Rolling Rock, and thereupon a strong desire to visit these caves before her departure seized hold of her. She was fond of romantic adventures, and her imagination was already at work. She pictured herself discovering the fugitive, and conducting him to the vehicle, which would bear him far away from the gendarmes. However, she had left her shawl on the seat of the carriage, and she decided to fetch it before exploring this desolate stretch of heath, where the wind was very keen. She accordingly retraced her steps, but to her utter dismay, she found that the vehicle had gone. The horse, having recovered from his fatigue, had become tired of waiting, and had wisely concluded to return to his stable. Coralie could see him trotting along the road to Salviac, and he had already made so much progress that there was no hope of her overtaking him. Her situation was now truly appalling. Young Mouleydier was amply avenged. What would become of her in this wilderness, and how was she to make her way out of it, without a guide, and some means of transport? To complete her misery, the cold was increasing with the approach of dusk. To spend the night out of

doors was to expose herself to almost certain death; she would be found frozen in the morning, like some soldier on the retreat from Moscow. At last, however, she again thought of the caves said to exist near the Rolling Rock, and said to herself that she might at least find shelter there. It would certainly be better to sleep on the ground than on the snow, and every one knows that caves, though cold in summer, are always warm in winter. She accordingly returned to the Rolling Rock, and making it her starting point she began to explore the surroundings. At first, she only saw masses of granite quite destitute of any cavity. They extended down a gentle slope leading to a frozen brook, and she slowly and cautiously made the descent, as it was difficult for her to maintain her footing on the slippery soil. On covering half of the distance to the stream, she found what she was in search of—a large fissure at the base of a huge rock, an opening wide enough and high enough for a man of medium stature to pass through it without stooping. The needed refuge was found. The next thing was to enter it, and although Coralie was no coward, her heart began to fail her. Not that she feared meeting any brigands; but it seemed to her that this gloomy cavity must be full of snakes and bats, and she shuddered at the mere thought of finding herself in contact with such loathsome creatures. The darkness also frightened her, and she would have given a large sum of money for a box of matches and one of the carriage lamps.

It was necessary to come to a decision, however, and summoning all her courage, she stepped into the cave. She had scarcely done so when she found herself in utter darkness, for near the entrance there was a sudden turn in the cavity whereby the light was intercepted and the wind as well, which was certainly some comfort. It was impossible for her to find her way along this subterranean passage except by touch, but as she cautiously advanced, step by step, she discovered that the soil ascended and that the passage was gradually becoming wider; however, she could still touch the ceiling by raising her hand above her head. The ground beneath her feet was smooth and firm.

"My bed won't be very soft," she thought; "but I prefer it to the snow."

She continued her advance, and suddenly inhaled a strange smell. It was like smoke catching her at the throat, and yet there could be no fire in the cave, for any person imprudent enough to light one would certainly be suffocated. This strange discovery alarmed her, and she would no doubt have retraced her steps, had she not been taken with a sudden fit of coughing that awakened all the echoes in the grotto.

"Who goes there?" inquired a strong, sonorous voice.

"A friend," replied Coralie, who was now in a state of abject terror.

No rejoinder came, but a powerful hand suddenly seized hold of the adventuress's arm and she perceived a red spark gleaming but a few inches from her face. This spark suddenly became brighter; then came a puff of smoke that nearly suffocated her, and she closed her eyes, just as these words fell upon her ear: "You, madame, here!"

This time she recognised Louis Chancelade's voice, and understood that he, on his side, had just recognised her by the light of his pipe, which he had quickened to a flame by a few vigorous puffs. Her courage instantly returned to her, and she had the presence of mind to say: "I was looking for you."

"But how did you know that I was here?" rejoined the fugitive.

"I will tell you how I guessed it; but first of all, let me rest, I can't stand any more," she said faintly.



Chancelade passed his arm round her trembling form, seated her upon a ledge of the rock, and remained standing near her. She was at first greatly moved, but she soon recovered her composure, and began to give Louis an account of her strange adventures. Chancelade listened in silence, until she mentioned the name of Martial Mouleydier, when he could not refrain from interrupting her. "What!" said he, "you know that scoundrel?"

"I did not know him," murmured Coralie, "but he introduced himself to me, and told me who he was. He dared to boast to me of having effected your arrest. I felt inclined to strangle him." She then related how she had left him upon the road, and explained the unfortunate circumstances which had induced her to seek a refuge in the cave.

"Was it Mouleydier who told you where you would find the entrance to this grotto?" inquired Chancelade.

"No; he spoke of several caves, and said it was quite probable that the idea of taking refuge in one of them would occur to you, but I scarcely hoped to find you. Ah! if that wretched old horse hadn't gone back to Salviac you could have got into the carriage with me, and we might have reached Chalus this evening—"

"I should certainly have been arrested, for I am known there. It isn't in that direction that I intend to go."

"May I venture to ask what do you intend to do?"

"I have no desire to conceal anything from you, madame. Last night I told Monsieur de Mussidan in your presence that I should take refuge in the woods of Valade, but I changed my mind, and went in the opposite direction. I reached this cave before sunrise, and decided to remain here till nightfall. The gendarmes must be searching for me, and as I could not escape them in the daylight, I decided to resume my journey this evening. A few miles from here I have a trusty friend, a farmer, who will receive me with open arms, procure me some other clothes, and take me in his own cart to Angoulême, where I shall be able to secure a seat in the diligence for Paris."

"There is nothing to prevent you from carrying out this very plan, it seems to me."

"But I cannot leave you here."

"I trust that you will take me with you. You promised to come and see me in Paris. We will reach the capital together."

"No, madame. I should do you great harm, for if the fact ever became known you would be regarded with suspicion. But if you have the strength for a three hours' tramp through the woods, I will take you to the farm of the friend I just spoke about."

"And leave me there!" exclaimed Coralie.

"Only until my friend's return. The vehicle that will take me to Angoulême to-night can convey you there on the day after to-morrow."

"I don't like the idea of being left behind," replied Coralie, "but your safety is the first thing to be considered, so I submit, and I am ready to start at once. Now that I have found you, my fatigue seems to have vanished."

"It is too early, madame," replied Chancelade. "We must wait till nightfall; and if you like to go to sleep, I can make you a couch of heather."

"I am not at all sleepy; I would much rather talk with you. Put out your pipe—it makes me cough—and take a seat here beside me."

Chancelade instantly removed his pipe from his mouth, but he remained standing, for he recollected what had occurred prior to his departure from the prison. Coralie, though firmly resolved to make a conquest of him later on, had the tact not to insist for the time being. "Do you know what occurred at the prison after your departure?" she continued.

"I was just going to ask you," replied Chancelade. "As I reached the end of the lane which separates the court-house from the prison I heard a shot fired. I thought at first that my absence had been discovered, and that the keepers were in pursuit of me. However, I made off as quickly as possible, and did not catch sight of any person."

"For the best of reasons. It wasn't at you that they fired."

"At whom were they firing, then?"

"At a man who had sealed the roof of the prison, and who was discovered by one of the jailers."

"Was he killed?"

"No; he succeeded in making his escape. But he must have been wounded, for stains of blood were distinctly visible at the foot of the wall. Nobody has the slightest idea as to who the intruder was."

"I can guess the truth. It was my best friend—the only one who has remained faithful to me in adversity. He risked his life in his attempt to rescue me, for he also is under the ban; and if he had been captured he would at least have been sentenced to transportation for life."

"But providing he has escaped, where can he be hiding?"

"In the same forest where I at first intended to take refuge."

"Poor fellow! if he is wounded, as I fear he is, he will perish of cold and hunger."

"That is true, and I thank you, madame, for reminding me that my duty won't allow me to desert him. I shall not go to Paris."

"What! Recollect that you can't save him, and that you will almost certainly be captured yourself. The scoundrel who denounced you told me just now that the gendarmes were scouring the Forest of Valade."

"They won't find Jacques. The thicket in which he is hiding is almost inaccessible, and I am the only person who knows the way to it. I will join him this very night."

"And what is to become of me?"

"I will escort you to Puyrazeau, where my farmer friend lives. The sun sets now at five o'clock. We can start from here at half-past five, and reach my friend's house before nine o'clock. You can spend the night there, and to-morrow he will take you to Angoulême. Meanwhile I shall retrace my steps, and, by taking a cross road, I can avoid passing through Salviac, and reach the woods of Valade before morning."

"You are really indefatigable," muttered Coralie.

Her admiration for Louis' mental and physical attributes was rapidly increasing, and had it been daylight he would have read this in her eyes; but the darkness deprived Coralie of this means of beguilement. She did manage to find his hand, however, and pressing it fervently, she said in a voice that trembled with emotion: "You are the bravest and most generous of men. I will do what you say. Whatever the sacrifice may cost me I will return to Paris without you, and endure uncomplainingly the cruel anxiety which I must necessarily feel until I see you again. But this suspense will be less intolerable if you will let me hear from you occasionally."

"Unfortunately, in the woods of Valade I sha'n't have any means of communication at my disposal; but I hope I shall not be obliged to remain there long."

"How will you manage to leave it?"

"It will be easier to leave it than to get into it—that is, unless Jacques is unable to walk, and in that case I shall remain with him until his wound is healed."

"But what if he should die?"

"Then my one thought will be to avenge him."

"At the peril of your life. You would risk your head, and this time you would not succeed in escaping. If you have no consideration for me, think of your sister."

"Who told you that I had a sister?" asked Chancelade, almost roughly.

"My friend, Madame Marteau, who spoke to me about Mademoiselle Edmée's beauty and virtue."

"But she isn't even acquainted with her."

"She met her yesterday in the street, and offered to assist her in any way in her power."

"My sister needs no one's assistance, especially that of our jailer's wife."

"It was through Madame Marteau's intercession that your sister was able to send you the linen and clothes you received yesterday. Monsieur Marteau objected strongly at first."

"He ought to have examined the articles carefully, for sewed in the lining of the waistcoat I found a note in which my sister warned me that a friend would no doubt attempt to set me at liberty that very night."

"You expected him, eh? and that was why you were already dressed when Monsieur de Mussidan opened the door of your cell."

"Monsieur de Mussidan!" repeated Chancelade, bitterly, "he isn't treated very rigorously, and yet it was he who induced my father to take up arms against the government."

"I believe that he is subject to the same rules as the other prisoners, but—I may certainly venture to say this to you—Madame Marteau has taken a great fancy to him."

"Then why didn't she allow him to escape instead of me?"

"He didn't wish to."

"Because he is sure of being released, no doubt. Clemency is generally shown to persons of rank, while I, who took no part whatever in the insurrection, am accused of an atrocious crime."

"Which you did not commit, I'm sure."

"No, certainly not. I hated the man who was killed, but I should never have stooped to murder him."

"I believe you, sir, and I wonder how suspicion could have fallen upon you."

"It would take too long to explain," said Chancelade, rather drily. "It is growing late, and I had better go out and see if it isn't dusk."

"Not without me, I beg. Don't leave me alone in this gloomy cave. I should die of fear."

"All right. Are you ready for your tramp, if it is time for us to start?"

"I am ready to go anywhere, and to brave anything, providing you lead the way."

"Then, come, madame. Give me your hand."

Coralie needed no urging. Chancelade walked on, and she followed him closely. They soon reached the entrance of the cave, and found that the

daylight was waning, although it was not yet dark. The grey, cheerless twilight of winter stretched around them, rendered still more gloomy by the fine snow which was just beginning to fall. "It is useless to wait any longer," said Chancelade. "The sooner we start, the sooner we shall reach Puyrazeau. You will have all the more time to rest there, and I can resume my journey as soon as I have left you safe under my friend Nassou's roof."

"Come, then," bravely said Coralie, adjusting her fur-lined cloak.

Chancelade advanced the first, motioned to her not to move until he had satisfied himself that there was no one in sight, and then, returning to her side, he helped her to descend the hill and cross the frozen stream, after which they started up a rocky path which led to the summit of the opposite incline. It was not quite so cold now that the snow had begun to fall, but the keen north wind lashed their faces and made them lower their heads. Coralie stumbled once or twice, but she did not complain, and Chancelade, taking pity on her, lent her the support of his arm. No urging was required to induce her to accept it, and they continued advancing. She was beginning to regret the promise she had made to tramp for three hours in such weather, and she asked herself if she would have strength to hold out until the end; however, her courage did not fail her, and she felt proud of her position as the companion of a hero. She saw that he was not in the least inclined to be sentimental, and that she would have considerable difficulty in conquering him, but difficulties always stimulated her to greater exertions.

They proceeded onward, and the path they were following soon grew narrower and narrower, till at last it became impossible for them to walk abreast; it was consequently necessary for Coralie to let go of her companion's sustaining arm, and stumble along over the stones as best she could. Louis carried a stout stick which he had cut on the outskirts of the wood for use as a weapon of defence. It was too heavy for Coralie, but he cut a second one longer and lighter, and gave it to her, advising her to use it as a staff. She was a little awkward with it at first, but he showed her how to use it, and she then got on more comfortably. "I only need a gourd, a cross on my bosom, and a broad-brimmed hat to transform me into a pilgrim," she said gaily. "My Paris friends would laugh heartily if they could see me now."

"They would not have the spirit and energy to do what you are doing," rejoined Louis.

"I could not do it but for you."

Chancelade took no notice of this remark, which seemed a kind of "feeler." In fact, he even requested her to talk as little as possible, so as to save her breath and strength for the severe climb that was before her.

Coralie realised that he was right, and at once relapsed into silence. At the end of half-an-hour they finally reached the wooded plateau which capped the hill. "Rest here for a few moments, madame," now said Chancelade. "The worst is over. The rest of the way leads over level ground."

"Oh! I shall merely take time to draw breath," replied Coralie, bravely. "I don't feel at all fatigued."

On the distant edge of the undulating plain which they had now reached there extended a dense black barrier. "That is a pine wood," now remarked Chancelade, "and when we have passed through it, we shall be but three hundred yards from the farm-house. However, the wood is further

off than it looks, and we had better push on. The snow has ceased falling, let us profit by the respite. I fear a wind storm. Let us try and reach our destination before it breaks out."

"Forward, then!" exclaimed Coralie, courageously, and they hastened on.

All went fairly well for about an hour, though poor Coralie suffered terribly from the cold. Moreover, she was not properly shod for a long tramp like this. Her dainty high-heeled boots were only fit to tread the asphalt of the Boulevard de la Madeleine or the Champs Elysées. Upon this rough ground her heels twisted and turned, and Chancelade was obliged to slacken his pace considerably, in order not to leave her behind. Moreover, in certain places where the snow had accumulated, they both sunk deeply into it, and had no little difficulty in floundering out again. And all the while the stretch of forest beyond the steppe seemed by a mirage-like effect to retreat in proportion as they advanced.

Coralie was now sustained by pride alone, and she eagerly sought some excuse to stop and rest. "You called your former friend just now by a very peculiar name," she remarked, resting both hands on the staff she carried. "Nassou! Who ever heard of a person named Nassou?"

"In the Limousin dialect it means Jean," replied Chancelade, who had also paused, out of consideration for his companion's weakness.

"We are in Limousin, then?"

"We are reaching it. Puyrazeau is on the boundary-line between the two departments."

"And what kind of a fellow is this farmer?"

"A very worthy man, who lives quietly on his little farm, with his wife. He will receive us cordially, and you will be perfectly safe at their house. We are not far from it now. Shall we resume our tramp?"

"Certainly, sir. I am not tired."

Coralie was telling a most outrageous falsehood in saying this, for she was nearly exhausted; but she made a supreme effort, and after a long and painful walk they reached the edge of the wood. "It will only take us about twenty minutes to go the rest of the way," said Chancelade; "and if you will take my advice, we won't tarry here. If you let your limbs rest, they will refuse to serve you, and you won't be able to start again; besides, the trees will shield you from the snow that is beginning to fall again."

Coralie's will and courage had sustained her failing strength for some time, but a moment came when mental energy could no longer cope with physical prostration. She did manage to cross the wood, supported by Chancelade, but she dragged herself along rather than walked, and when they emerged from among the trees her head fell upon the shoulder of her guide, and she murmured faintly: "I am sleepy. I must sleep!"

Louis realised that she was overcome by the cold. He had heard it said in his childhood, that during the retreat from Moscow, the soldiers who yielded to sleep never woke again, and he resolved not to allow this fair Parisienne to give way to the numbing stupor that was creeping over her. He spoke to her sternly; he even shook her, but without avail. He could not rouse her from the torpid state into which she had fallen. If he abandoned her, even for a short time, death would probably intervene; and if he was to save her, it must be by his own exertions, for he could expect no help from any one.

The only course remaining to him was to pick Coralie up, and carry her

to the farm-house, the lights of which he could now see gleaming three hundred yards ahead. He did so, unhesitatingly. Coralie partially opened her eyes, passed her arm around Chancelade's neck, murmured a few words which he failed to catch, and again sunk into that heavy slumber which seemed so much like death. She was not very heavy, but her weight sufficed to retard the progress of a weary man, and it took him some time to reach the farm-house. He did reach it at last, however, and on peering in at the lower window he saw Nassou and his good wife sitting in front of the hearth, on which a bright fire was blazing. The woman was knitting; her husband was smoking his pipe and cleaning an old rifle. They were alone, and they both quickly sprung to their feet as Chancelade went in without knocking.

"What! is it you?" exclaimed the husband. "I was at Salviac on the day before yesterday, and heard that you were in prison."

"I escaped last night with the assistance of this lady I am carrying. She must be put to bed, and every effort made to revive her."

"Lay her upon our bed, Monsieur Louis," said Madame Nassou. "There, the poor dear creature. Why, she is nearly frozen! I will go and warm some wine for her. That will bring her round all right."

"I intrust her to your care, my dear Catherine; and you Nassou," he added, turning to the farmer, "you will surely do me the favour to take her as far as Angoulême to-morrow, in your cart."

"Certainly. Will you accompany us?"

"Oh, the gendarmes are in search of me, and if they met me, they would take me back to prison."

"In that case, you had better remain here. We can see the gendarmes approach a long way off, and I defy them to find the cave in which I will hide you."

"Impossible! I must be in the woods of Valade before morning."

"Seven leagues from here! You can't do it."

"Yes, I can. It is barely nine o'clock now; I can get there before daybreak."

"What are you going to do there?"

"I want to see how my friend Jacques—you know, the poacher—is getting on. He tried to help me to escape, and while doing so, he was fired at from the prison yard. He must have been wounded, but if he is able to walk I intend to return here with him."

"Is it true that you killed the commissary?"

"No. I swear it, by the life of my father, and I hope that they will eventually discover the real murderer. But I would rather blow my brains out than be taken back to prison. When I see you again I will explain how it all happened. In the meantime, you must tell this lady as soon as she is restored to consciousness, that I have gone off. I warned her that I should leave her in your charge. I haven't time to explain where she came from, and I don't know much about her, but you can take her to Angoulême without the slightest danger. She was not mixed up in any of the disturbances at Salviac; besides, she will tell you all about herself if you ask her. Now I'm going; till we meet again. I may, perhaps, be back to-morrow!"

After these brief explanations, Chancelade hurried away, leaving Nassou and his wife in a state of bewilderment. Coralie was still asleep.

## VI.

It was Saturday, market-day at Salviac, and a week had elapsed since the murder of the commissary-general. The town had regained its wonted aspect. The club-house was as full as usual. A game of *bezique* was going on in the very room in which M. Santelli had fallen, and the tragical event which had so much upset the district was no longer talked about. The state of affairs was unchanged, however. The gendarmes had scoured the surrounding country, but they had failed to recapture Louis Chancelade. His sister Edmée, who was closely watched, never left her home, and her conduct was such as to dispel all suspicion of complicity with the fugitive. She received occasional visits from her neighbour, M. Braconne, who was to have defended her brother before the assizes, but the leader of the local bar was not a suspicious character by any means. Louis' father was at Toulon, waiting to embark for Cayenne, and the persons who had attacked the escort on the road to Périgueux were still unknown. Adhémar de Mussidan was still an inmate of the prison, where he led much the same life as previously, except that he was deprived of the fair Aurélie's visits, the chief-warder having secured all the cell doors with enormous padlocks after Louis' flight. Coralie's sudden departure had created very little commotion. The residents scarcely knew her by sight; and young Mouleydier had felt no inclination to boast of his adventure. Nor was he obliged to indemnify the jobmaster, for the horse had returned home, bringing the vehicle with him, and the owner had promised to say nothing about the affair.

The new government now seemed firmly established, and counted numerous adherents in the provinces. Its opponents were disarming. Political excitement was abating, and everything indicated a speedy return to the usual tranquil state of things. The authorities of the town were the only people who had failed to grow calm. The officials of the prosecution office were more furious than ever about Louis Chancelade's disappearance. The prosecutor's assessor was quite enraged, and even talked of conducting the search in person, and of hunting down the fugitive republicans like wolves. His superior contented himself with inditing reports against the chief-warder, the lieutenant of gendarmes, and even against the sub-prefect, who was no favourite with him.

M. Vignory was positively shaking in his shoes. He scarcely dared to leave the sub-prefecture for fear that some one might ask him an embarrassing question about the fair stranger who had arrived from Paris in a brougham, and who had so mysteriously disappeared; and every morning he opened his newspapers and letters in fear and trembling, for he expected to see a notice of his recall. So far, however, the *Moniteur*, the official journal, had made no allusion to the matter, and Vignory had merely received a brief and mocking note from Coralie, announcing her return to Paris, and advising him to tender his resignation without delay, as Salviac was a wretched hole, which he ought to gladly leave.

However, Vignory's anxiety was nothing in comparison with that which tormented the Marteaux. The husband accused his wife of having facilitated the prisoner's escape by giving him the clothing in which Edmée had probably concealed some message to prepare him for the opportunity which was about to be afforded him. Aurélie retorted by reproaching Pierre

for his negligence, and prophesying that he would certainly lose his post. She also secretly vowed vengeance against her spurious cousin, Coralie, who had—unintentionally, it is true—put an end to her pleasant visits to the baron; and she bitterly reproached herself for having sheltered her merely to oblige Vignory, who was no longer in a position to be of use to them, as he was certain to be recalled. The husband and wife, unknown to each other, had each written to General de Plancoët, entreating him to avert the impending danger of dismissal, but neither of them had received any reply.

The chief-warder now displayed increased zeal in the discharge of his functions, and avenged Chancelade's flight upon the prisoners who remained in his custody. In fact, he treated M. de Mussidan very badly. He intercepted M. de Sigoulès's presents, and he confiscated the famous accordion which, at an earlier stage, had cheered Adhémar's leisure hours. The young nobleman still managed to communicate by signs with his jailer's pretty wife, and the latter informed him that Chancelade had not been recaptured, which was all he cared to know. Smoking the last of his cigars, he cheerfully waited for the great personages in Paris to decide his fate; firmly convinced, however, that he would be released some day or other. And he had some grounds for relying upon this contingency, for the days of severity were over, and those in power were anxious to efface all remembrance of the recent insurrections.

The Count de Sigoulès, who was still anxious, had written to General de Plancoët reminding him of the friendship that had once existed between them, and begging of him to exert his influence in favour of Adhémar. The general had promptly replied that he would immediately petition for the Baron de Mussidan's release, and that he had strong hopes of obtaining it, as the Prince-President was anxious to show all possible clemency to such royalists as had taken part in the insurrection, so as to win them over to his side by-and-bye.

The old nobleman, reassured by this letter, thereupon decided to spend his Saturday at Salviac as usual, not so much to play his game of whist with his usual partners as to ascertain what had occurred there during the week. He also intended to call on Edméc Chancelade; and he was the more anxious to show her this mark of interest as he had expressed the utmost horror of the commissary's murderer to the gendarmes who were in pursuit of the fugitive.

At twelve o'clock precisely the count's well-known tilbury drew up in front of the hostelry patronized by the neighbouring gentry. M. de Sigoulès alighted from it, sent his horse to the stable, and started off in the direction of the Chancelades' house. He had breakfasted before leaving home, and he intended to return to his château before nightfall, so he had only time to pay his call and afterward have a chat with his friends at the club.

The streets of Salviac being crowded on market days with carts and cattle, most of the well-to-do town's-folk stayed indoors, so that the count met but few acquaintances; however, the peasants bowed to him deferentially and he returned their salutes, but without stopping as usual to inquire if beef were still at the same price. Many years had elapsed since he had visited his tenant's home, but he had not forgotten the way to the old house to which his mother had sometimes taken him in his childhood, for the Chancelades had tilled the lands of the Sigoulès for more than a hundred years. He recollected having played more than once in the



garden, with Lonis and Edmée's father who was now an exile, and not far from his own age ; and he felt most kindly disposed towards the children of the worthy fellow whom he had not been able to shield from the wrath of the government. He resolved to have a long and friendly talk with Edmée, who would certainly not refuse to give him a frank statement of her brother's case ; and he intended, when fully informed on the subject, to intercede for the fugitive and endeavour to put a stop to the search for him—that is, if the sister succeeded in convincing him of her brother's innocence.

The General-Marquis de Plancoët, was a very powerful man, and the influence which he had kindly promised to exert on behalf of Baron de Mussidan would certainly enable him to get a poor schoolmaster, who was unjustly accused, out of difficulty. So M. de Sigoulès walked on, his heart brimful of good intentions, and on reaching Edmée's house he announced his arrival by a resounding knock.

He was kept waiting some time : so long, in fact, that he was beginning to think that Mademoiselle Chancelade must have gone out, but at last she cautiously opened the door.

"Yon here, Monsieur le Comte !" she exclaimed, still holding the door only half-way open, however. "I did not expect to see you."

"And why, my dear child ?" inquired M. de Sigoulès, almost affectionately.

"Because you told the gendarmes that, even if my brother came to yon for shelter, you would not admit him to the château," replied Edmée, coldly. "I thought yon had taken sides against him."

"The lieutenant misunderstood me. I only told him my doors were closed against the commissary's murderer, which is a very different thing, for I feel sure that yonr brother had nothing whatever to do with the affair. I hope, too, that you are not going to close your doors against me," added the old nobleman, smiling. "I have several things to say to yon, and this is not a very comfortable place for a prolonged conversation."

"Pray come in, Monsieur le Comte," said the young girl, opening the door, and standing aside to let the count pass.

"There has been no change here since my first visit sixty years ago," he continued. "I am sure I should recognize every article of furniture in the room where your grandfather used to sit enthroned in an old arm-chair covered with Flanders tapestry which my grandfather gave him. And I see at the end of the hall the little garden where I played ride-a-cock-horse with your father. What a magnificent view there was from it !"

"So there still is if you care to look at it."

"It would afford me great pleasure, if you are not afraid of taking cold."

"I am not afraid of anything now," said Edmée sadly.

"Yon must, indeed, have suffered very much during the past two months. Your father sent into exile without a trial ; yonr brother arrested on a false charge ! So far as your father is concerned, I assure you that it was no fault of mine that his case resulted as it did. I did all that I could to have him kept at Salviac ; but unfortunately party feeling ran high, and I, myself, was regarded with suspicion on account of my political opinions, and especially on account of the conduct of my cousin Mussidan. But the excitement is now abating, and I hope to prevent my old friend's departure for Cayenne after all."

"And in the meantime he is in prison."

"In a case like this, imprisonment is no disgrace ; and I shall move

heaven and earth to obtain his release." Then as they reached the garden, he added, "There is the view I admired so much in years gone by. It is truly superb; I should like to have an equally beautiful prospect from the windows of my château!"

The sunlight of a bright winter's day illumined the scene, for the weather had undergone a complete change since the Saturday before, and the temperature was now so mild that every vestige of snow had disappeared. "I see that cursed club-house over there," continued M. de Sigoulès. "Do you know that I was there when that Corsican commissary was killed? He fell only a few feet from me; but the deuce take me if I suspected that they were going to accuse and arrest the son of one of my tenants! When I first heard the news, I protested with all my might, and I have not hesitated to express my opinion of that rascally sub-prefect's conduct. Need I add that I was delighted to hear of your brother's miraculous escape. But I have heard none of the particulars. How did he manage to escape under the very eyes of the warder who is persecuting my cousin Adhémar?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Then you have not seen Louis since he made his escape?"

"No. He must have thought our house would be searched. It was, in fact, scoured from top to bottom, only a few hours after his disappearance."

"On the same morning when the gendarmes paid me a visit, no doubt. Louis must have taken refuge in the forests, and I am surprised that he has not been recaptured before now. However some one must certainly have assisted him in escaping from the jail, and you, of course, know who it was."

Edmée made no reply. She kept her eyes fixed upon the wood-crowned hills on the other side of the Dronne, and did not appear to even hear the count's remark.

"That is, unless assistance was rendered by some one inside the prison," continued M. de Sigoulès. "The head-jailer has a wife who seems much more lenient than her husband. I was present last Saturday when she spoke to you on the square, and she did not hesitate to express her sympathy for Louis. You had left us, however, when she promised to do all in her power to ease the lot of two of her husband's prisoners, your brother and my cousin. Do you think she opened the prison doors for Louis out of sympathy? You don't answer," continued M. de Sigoulès, who was beginning to be annoyed by the girl's continued silence. "What are you looking at so intently? Are you awaiting some signal? Is it the smoke that is rising there from behind those trees?"

For some moments, indeed, a thick column of smoke had been rising slowly from behind the distant chestnuts. There was no wind, so that this smoke ascended vertically in a pillar-like coil. "It is a brush fire, lighted by some shepherd," murmured the old nobleman.

"No," replied Edmée, whose eyes were now sparkling joyously, "not by a shepherd, but by one of my friends, to tell me that my brother has left the neighbourhood, and is now in safety—far away from here."

"So much the better. Well, now that he is safe, you can surely tell me where he has been hiding."

"Not far from your château—in the woods of Valade."

"He was fortunate, then, to escape the gendarmes, who have been searching every part of the woods. It isn't necessary to ask you the name of the person who gives you this signal. It is that good-for-nothing Jacques, my former gamekeeper, no doubt."

"No."

"But it was he who set your brother free, was it not?"

"He endeavoured to do so, though I had begged of him not to endanger his life in attempting an impossibility. He did not succeed, and he was wounded in the arm—he was fired at from the court-yard of the prison—but he managed to descend from the roof upon which he had climbed, and to get away, after Louis had made his escape, nobody knows how."

"I can guess, however. It must certainly have been the jailer's pretty wife who released him, after which he immediately joined his friend Jacques. But how have you managed to obtain news of them?"

"Jacques has a number of friends among the peasants who come to market here. This morning a woman came here on the pretext of selling me some poultry. She told me that Louis and Jacques—who had nearly recovered from his wound—had left the neighbourhood, and that if their guide, a worthy young fellow from Lesguillae, succeeded in conducting them to a place of safety, he would light a fire upon that hill when he returned."

"But I wonder where they have taken refuge. They cannot go far without money."

"I sent Louis some money—previously—by the same peasant woman."

"Then Louis and Jacques may succeed in reaching Paris, though that is a very dangerous place for them. The police are much more formidably organised there than at Salviae. Still, your brother may escape their notice, if he wears a different costume. But I can't picture that young savage, Jacques, in the attire of a gentleman. He is so peculiar in his appearance that he will have a deal of difficulty in passing himself off for an honest man."

"He is one all the same," replied Mademoiselle Chancelade, with a vivacity which the Count de Sigoulès did not fail to notice.

"As nearly as a poacher can be," he gently replied. "It isn't my fault if he is living in the woods. I made every effort to retain him in my service, and I would have done my best to insure him an honourable livelihood. He would make a splendid soldier, but I fear he will remain a vagabond to the end of his days."

"He has promised me the contrary."

"Then you have seen him recently?"

"On the day following my brother's arrest, and since then he sent me word that they both meant to go to America. I shall join them there."

"What! my dear Edmée, you would leave your home and friends—"

"I no longer have any friends in France, and I won't live under a government which has treated my father like a common criminal."

"But this government won't last forever, and the persecutions are coming to an end. I shall succeed in obtaining your father's pardon, and in proving that your brother is innocent. You can assist me in doing so, mademoiselle, for you must know where he was when the commissary was shot."

"Yes; and I will tell you now that he has escaped. He went with Jacques to the Perigueux road, to lie in wait for the carriage containing my father. They attacked the escort—but there were only two of them—and they did not succeed in delivering him."

"The deuce! that complicates the situation terribly. They wounded a gendarme, and in these days such an attack is regarded as a very serious matter. I begin to think that they will do right to sail for America. But

you, my poor child, are not obliged to exile yourself. Remain here, and wait for better days. An amnesty will be declared, sooner or latter, and then your brother can return, for in the meantime, the commissary's murderer will surely be discovered. You will tell me, perhaps, that a young girl can't live alone. Ah, well, I will find you a husband."

"I don't wish to marry."

"But why not? You have everything requisite to win a good husband."

"My hand is already promised."

"To Jacques, perhaps."

"Yes, to Jacques."

"Well, allow me to say that a young woman like you can't marry—a poacher."

"This poacher has twice risked his life to save my father and my brother. He loves me—and I love him."

"What folly! I don't deny that the young fellow possesses many qualities. He is very good-looking; he is brave, and I don't think him bad at heart. You admire him because he is unlike the young fops you see about Salviac, and you think you love him. But if you are really so foolish as to marry him, you will be sorry for it all your life. Profit by the result of my experience and observation, my dear Edmée: heroes of romance make detestable husbands. For instance, there is my cousin Mussidan, who is a favourite with all the ladies, and for much the same reasons as Jacques, but I should sincerely pity the woman who married him."

"I am greatly obliged to you, sir, for the advice you are kind enough to give me."

"But you are determined not to follow it. Ah, well, consult your brother."

"My brother will approve my choice," said Edmée, firmly.

"You must allow me to doubt that," replied M. de Sigoulès. "He likes Jacques, and is under great obligations to him, no doubt; but he is sensible enough to understand that such a marriage is impossible. I feel certain, too, that your father would oppose it, and you can't marry without his consent, as you are still a minor."

"I can wait. I shall not marry Jacques in France, but in America, and he isn't there yet. Heaven only knows whether he and my brother will succeed in getting out of the country. I shall not leave Salviac until I have received news of their safe arrival in Paris."

"It seems to me that you are forgetting your father," said the old nobleman, rather severely.

"No, I don't forget him, but I can do nothing to help him. I should not even be allowed to see him if I went to Toulon. However, when he reaches Cayenne, my brother, Jacques, and myself will go there and try to set him free."

M. de Sigoulès shrugged his shoulders. The plan seemed utterly impracticable to him; and yet, in spite of himself, he was compelled to admire the dauntless energy of this girl of twenty, who talked of crossing the pestilential marshes of Guiana, and rescuing a prisoner as if it were the simplest thing in the world. "Mademoiselle," he said, in a more cordial manner, "while you are waiting for these generous hopes to be realised, you won't take it amiss, I trust, if I exert what little influence I may still possess in Paris, in your brother's favour. If I could succeed in proving that he was not in Salviac on the evening the commissary was murdered,

I am almost sure that he would be treated with much less severity. Will you allow me to state where he was?"

"Louis would gain nothing by it. In fact, the authorities would be much more severe on him if they knew that he fired on the gendarmes."

"I think you are mistaken. The authorities cannot censure a man's attempt to rescue his father, very severely; and I might, perhaps, succeed in persuading them to ignore the unfortunate affair altogether."

"Well, you can do as you think best, Monsieur le Comte, providing you don't compromise Jacques, by mentioning that he had a hand in the matter. He has not the same excuse for his conduct, for he isn't a member of our family."

"I will take good care not to implicate him; but I must tell you that it will be difficult to convince people of your brother's innocence as regards the commissary until the real culprit is discovered. Do you think the shot was fired by one of the rebels who are still at large?"

"I know nothing at all about it. But I have learned from my neighbour, Monsieur Braconne, and from Doctor Thiviers, that the bullet which killed the commissary was too large to have been fired from an ordinary sporting rifle."

"Indeed!" exclaimed M. de Sigoulès. "Why, that is a very convincing piece of evidence. Your brother has never possessed a military weapon, I believe. The public prosecutor must be greatly prejudiced to pay no attention to such a very important fact."

"Monsieur Braconne intended to make use of it before the assizes, for he wished to defend Louis, and was sanguine of securing an acquittal."

"That was kind, very kind of him. I shall take occasion to thank him this very day."

"And I must ask you to say nothing to him about my intended departure for Paris."

"I won't say a word about it, of course. But have you really decided to leave Salviac? If so, you may need money?"

"I shall leave in the course of the next few days; and as for money, I have ten thousand francs in gold which my father intrusted to me on the eve of the insurrection, and I feel that I have a right to use them."

"Yes, certainly; but if you preferred not to touch them, I will cheerfully lend you all the money you need. I don't approve of your journey; but if you are resolved on it you ought to have plenty of money at your disposal."

"The amount in my possession will more than suffice for our expenses to America."

"Very well. But how will you find your brother and—your friend—in Paris?"

"The first letter Louis writes will give me all the necessary information."

"Yes; if it is not intercepted. Remember that the present authorities have no scruples about the means they employ. Had I foreseen all this, I should have urged you to carry on your correspondence with your brother through me. Where do you intend to stop in Paris?"

"At a hotel, I suppose, unless my brother—"

"Your brother will have plenty to attend to, in keeping out of the clutches of the police. He would act most imprudently if he even came to the station to meet you; and really, the more I think of it, the more impracticable this plan of meeting him in Paris seems to me. You would do much better to wait until I have proved an *alibi* for him. It will be a

difficult matter, but it isn't an impossibility, and I will set about it immediately. However, you can't go alone to a hotel. Young and pretty as you are, you would be exposed to all sorts of annoyances. If you persist in your scheme, I can recommend you to an old gentlewoman whom I have known for twenty years. She resides in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and can shelter you for a while without the slightest inconvenience. However, there will be plenty of time to settle all these details, only promise me not to leave Salviac without warning me. I will be here two hours after the receipt of your note. Is it agreed?"

"Yes," replied Edmée, who was beginning to forget her former prejudices against the count, and to realise that his advice was sensible after all.

"Very well; I have your promise," said M. de Sigoulès, "and I shall depend upon it. Now, I must leave you. I am anxious to see Monsieur Braconne, and I shall surely find him at the club. By the way, does he know that your brother took part in the attack upon the escort on the road to Périgueux?"

"He suspected it, and questioned me on the subject, and I did not deny it."

"Then I can allude to the matter? In fact, I shall not fail to do so. We will unite in defending your brother, and we must come to an understanding as to what should be done. Good-bye, my dear Edmée. Keep up a stout heart."

The young girl escorted M. de Sigoulès to the door of the house, and he went off well pleased with the result of his interview, and firmly resolved to do his best to prove Louis' innocence. He even flattered himself that his prudent advice would be followed.

He walked straight towards the club-house, reflecting upon the commissary's tragical death, and wondering who could have killed him, since Louis Chancelade was certainly not the culprit, as the circumstance of the bullet plainly demonstrated. He was particularly struck with the information he had received on that point. He remembered that in the attack upon Salviac early in December the insurgents had been armed with fowling-pieces, pistols, and even cudgels. Adhémar de Mussidan, their commander, had carried an old cavalry sabre and a carbine. Now, judging by what he had heard, the weapon used to kill the commissary was a military gun. However, there had never been any garrison at Salviac, nor any regulars momentarily located there, the gendarmes having sufficed to disperse the rebels after a very short encounter. Did the weapon from which the fatal bullet had been fired belong to a resident of the town? That did not seem probable. Besides, what had the murderer done with his weapon after the crime? If he had thrown it away, it would have been found, so he must have carried it off. Louis Chancelade, however, at the time of his arrest, had merely a double-barrelled sporting gun in his possession.

These thoughts engrossed the mind of M. de Sigoulès to such a degree that before entering the club-house he resolved to examine its surroundings and, above all, the terrace from which the fatal shot had been fired. The terrace was merely separated from the public walk, known as the Esplanade, by a low wall which could be easily scaled. The count went in this direction, and despite his dignity he was about to climb the wall, when he saw upon the terrace, some distance off, a party of five or six gentlemen with whom he was well acquainted, and who seemed to be engaged in an animated conversation with the club gardener. The latter held in his hand something which he was showing to the gentlemen, though what it was

the old nobleman was quite unable to determine. M. Braconne, the advocate whom M. de Sigoulès wished to see, was one of the group, and as he caught sight of Adhémar's cousin, he cried out: "Ah, count, you are just in time! Come and hear about the strange discovery that Pilois has just made."

M. de Sigoulès hastily sprang over the wall and joined the party. M. Bourdeille, the judge, and Dr. Thiviers were present, so that Chancelade had no lack of champions. "What is the matter?" asked the count.

"Pilois just found this rifle in the nook where he keeps his gardening tools. The weapon was concealed behind some watering-pots."

"Hand it here, and let me examine it," said the count. "Ah! it is of English make, and indeed the name of the maker is engraved upon the barrel—Manton—the best gunsmith in London. There are very few of his weapons in France, though the last time I was in Paris, one of my friends of the Union Club showed me one very similar to this. He had purchased it in England in view of hunting lions in Algeria."

"It is formidable enough for hunting the most ferocious wild beasts."

"And it is a breechloader—a new invention comparatively unknown in France."\*

"And entirely unknown at Salviac. I don't believe you could find another weapon like this in the whole district."

"It is a beauty," remarked Monsieur de Sigoulès, who was a connoisseur in such matters.

As he spoke, he took the weapon and examined its mechanism. "Why!" he exclaimed, "the cartridge is still here. The gun's loaded—that is, unless—let me see—no, the cartridge has been fired. Only the capsule remains in the chamber."

"I was sure of it," replied the doctor. "The weapon has been fired, and I know where the bullet is that came out of it."

"What?" hastily exclaimed M. Bourdeille; "you think that this weapon—"

"Was used to kill the commissary; and I will prove it, if you like. The bullet I extracted from Monsieur Santelli's body is of the very same calibre. Comparison will suffice to prove it."

"This, gentlemen, is a discovery which plainly establishes Louis Chancelade's innocence," remarked M. Braconne.

"Well, yes, it is very evident that the weapon doesn't belong to him," added M. Bourdeille.

"A Manton rifle costs a thousand francs in London," remarked M. de Sigoulès, "and not only has Chancelade never been in England, but he cannot have saved enough money from his salary to purchase such a weapon."

"The thing to be done now is to discover whom it belongs to," rejoined the judge. "I know no one in the town likely to own a weapon of this kind."

"There is nothing to prove that the murderer is a native of the locality. The commissary had enemies in all the departments in which he resorted to rigorous measures. One of these enemies may have followed him here to kill him."

"Yes; but he would have taken his gun home with him, instead of leaving it here," replied M. Bourdeille.

"The fact is, I can't understand how it came here," said the count.

\* The reader will remember that these incidents are supposed to occur in 1852.—*Trans.*

"The hiding-place is by no means conspicuous, especially at night time, so the murderer must have been aware of its existence."

"That is true; and from this fact I conclude that the murderer is a resident of Salviac."

"If he had lived in Salviac he could have concealed the weapon in his house, instead of leaving it here," objected M. Braconne.

"That is by no means certain," replied the judge. "He might have feared a visit from the police. Besides I can guess now what occurred after the shot was fired. As the sub-prefect opened the window, the murderer saw that he would be pursued, and instead of flying towards the river, he crouched down close to the wall near the basement of the club-house. He allowed his pursuers to descend the hill, and then he quietly returned home by way of the esplanade; but as he did not think it prudent to go through the town with his gun upon his shoulder, he hid his weapon in this nook."

"Your explanation seems a very plausible one, my dear judge," said M. de Sigoulès, "and I now feel satisfied that the son of my tenant was not the murderer."

"He made a great mistake in running away from prison," remarked the leader of the bar. "If he had remained where he was, the investigating magistrate, who had no prejudices against him, would have certainly dismissed the charge."

"He may do so even now," said M. de Sigoulès.

"I doubt it. A suspected person who absconds is always presumed to be guilty. Chancelade will be judged by default, and will probably be condemned to undergo the highest penalty of the law—that is to say, death."

"Well, it isn't allowable for us to prejudge the case," said M. Bourdeille, "but it is certainly necessary for us to report our friend Pilois' discovery. Indeed it is my duty as a magistrate to do so. So I shall go straight to the public prosecutor who will certainly have to listen to me."

"There are none so deaf as those who won't hear," growled the old count, "and the prosecutor is so bitter against all the opponents of his government, that we cannot place much reliance on his impartiality. Still, you can make the attempt."

"And I will accompany you," exclaimed Dr. Thiviers. "I certainly have a right to be heard, as I was the person who performed the necropsy." And then turning to the gardener, he added: "You, Pilois, had better accompany us, and tell the prosecutor how you happened to discover the weapon. He will not doubt your veracity, whereas he might question ours."

"And I," said the count, "am going to the club, where, I need hardly, say, I shall impatiently await your return, for I am anxious to learn what will be the decision of this magistrate in whom I have no confidence whatever."

"He won't come to any decision at all," replied the doctor. "He will content himself with referring the case to his superiors. We shall also have a bitter opponent in the person of the sub-prefect, who hopes to secure promotion for having arrested Chancelade. But what does that matter? We shall have done our duty."

"Let us be off then," said the judge, who fully agreed with his friend, Dr. Thiviers.

Pilois shouldered the rifle and opened the line of march. M. Bourdeille



and the doctor followed ; while the count, drawing M. Braconne a little aside, and looking him full in the face, inquired : " What do you think of all this, my dear sir ? "

" I think that this matter is beginning to assume a new aspect. I felt certain of young Chancelade's innocence before, and if he were here, I should feel sure of securing his acquittal, for I have no doubt that the owner of this costly weapon will soon be discovered. "

" I hope so, indeed, though I am by no means confident of it. Have you seen Chancelade's sister lately ? "

" Yes, and I very much regret that she did not follow the advice I gave her. But the mischief is done now, and I fear it will prove irreparable. I even fear that she will aggravate it by joining her brother and the young rascal who assisted him in making his escape. "

" You mean Jacques, my former gamekeeper, I suppose ? "

" Yes. I had a dream of a very different future for this young girl. "

" I am happy to hear that you take an interest in her. "

" What would you think, Monsieur le Comte, if I told you that I desired to marry her ? "

" I should esteem you all the more. Edmée is perfect both as regards beauty and moral qualities. "

" Unfortunately, I am a little too old for her, and I have renounced all hope of winning her ; but I shall always remain her devoted servant. "

" You are right. I am very much afraid that she is not acting very wisely. However, we shall have other opportunities of speaking about her. Meanwhile, pray tell me what has been going on in Salviac since last Saturday. Who was that lady who arrived that day in an old brougham and drove to the sub-prefecture ? "

" Oh, there is quite a story about her. She is said to be a relative of Madame Marteau, the chief-warder's wife. She began by calling on the sub-prefect, and he offered her his arm to escort her to the prison, where she was very cordially received by the Marteaux, who undertook to lodge her. "

" And is she there still ? "

" No. The strange part of the affair is, that less than twenty-four hours later, the fair stranger, who probably didn't find prison life much to her taste, departed as suddenly as she came. "

" Had she already gone when Chancelade made his escape ? " inquired the old nobleman, hastily.

" No ; she disappeared on the following day. "

" Disappeared ? " repeated the count.

" Yes, that is the word ; for no one in Salviac knows where or how she went. Some folks declare, however, that they saw her drive off in a carriage with young Martial Mouleydier. "

" The little clerk that jumped out of the club-window after the sub-prefect ? "

" Exactly, and the same fellow who denounced Chancelade to the sub-prefect, whose associate he is. "

" Then this woman carried the clerk off. I can't say I think much of her taste. "

" Oh, he returned to Salviac that same evening ; but nothing has since been seen or heard of the fair stranger, although Monsieur Vignory gave some friends to understand that she had been sent to Salviac on a political mission. "

"It was probably to watch the prisoners then, as she made the prison her home. She passed me so quickly last Saturday that I didn't have time to get a look at her. I only noticed that she was enveloped in furs."

"I did not see her at all, but the doctor, who met her in the street, tells me that she was very pretty and stylish, evidently a Parisienne like the jailer's wife."

"Who knows but what they brought about Chancelade's escape?" said the count. "He is a handsome fellow, and he probably won the two women's hearts."

"But your cousin Mussidan is equally good-looking," rejoined the advocate. "They wouldn't have left him in prison if they had been able to open the doors for any of Marteau's prisoners. I have an entirely different theory. I think that some one set a trap for Louis. He was allowed to escape because it was thought that he would certainly be recaptured. It was hoped he would take refuge in his sister's house, or in yours, or that he would join the insurgents who are still at large. The authorities wanted to make people believe in the existence of a great conspiracy, and to implicate you, Edmée, and others in it."

"My dear Monsieur Braconne, I think you are going too far. These people are capable of anything, but they haven't as much imagination as you suppose. But it doesn't matter how Chancelade made his escape. The point is to prove that he did not kill the commissary, and the only means of proving that, is to find the real culprit, and I hope we shall soon succeed in doing so. I wish I could see my cousin, Adhémar. He was in the prison when this miraculous escape took place, and he must know a great many things of which we are ignorant."

"But they have refused you permission to see him, unfortunately."

"I shall make another attempt to obtain it, all the same. I have an old comrade in Paris, who now holds a high position, and who is exerting himself in Adhémar's behalf. In fact, he has promised to secure his release. I have recently discovered that this great personage is the protector of Jailer Marteau, or rather of Madame Marteau, which amounts to the same thing. Now what do you say to entering the club? It is a great place for gossip, and we may be able to pick up some information there."

"That is a good idea, count. Play is now going on, and all the land-owners of the neighbourhood are in the card-room. Some of them will be sure to chatter about Louis Chancelade's escape."

They found a numerous company assembled in the room where M. Santelli had been shot on the previous Saturday. M. Bizouin, the prosecutor's assessor, was holding forth to a circle of members, and the first words that reached the old nobleman's ear apprized him that Edmée's brother was the subject of conversation. The assessor was declaring that the fugitive would soon be recaptured, and that he had only escaped through the complicity of sundry persons whom he forbore to name, though he gave his hearers to understand that his superior had reported them to the minister, and that their dismissal was merely a question of time. He was plainly referring to the chief-warder, and perhaps to the sub-prefect as well. This was pleasant news to M. de Sigoulès, who cordially detested both officials. He would, however, have abstained from joining in the conversation, had not M. Bizouin suddenly taken it into his head to inveigh loudly against the Baron de Mussidan, who, he declared, fully deserved to be already on his way to Cayenne. At all events this country squire would have no leniency showed to him in prison. This term, "country squire."

so greatly incensed the count, that he walked up to the assessor, and taking hold of one of his coat-buttons, and looking him straight in the eyes, exclaimed : "My young sir, I cannot prevent you from discharging the duties of prosecutor, but I forbid you to speak of my cousin again in such terms. The Baron de Mussidan is in prison, convict him if you can, but don't dare to speak disparagingly of his birth. If you do, you will have to answer to me."

"I have no orders to receive from you, sir," stammered Bizouin, turning pale.

"That is possible, but I give you my orders all the same, and I swear that you will have occasion to repent it, if you don't obey them. Not a word more if you don't want me to chastise you on the spot."

This was said in such a tone that the unfortunate assessor could only turn on his heel, under pretext of maintaining his dignity. He did not care to have this bellicose nobleman seize him by the collar, but he resolved to avenge the insult upon Adhémar de Mussidan, who was not in a position to defend himself. The altercation created some commotion and interrupted the game of *bezique*, for M. de Sigoulès had spoken in a loud voice ; however, M. Braconne prevented the matter from going any further by dragging the count away, saying, as he did so : "Do you expect to conciliate your cousin's persecutors by this sort of conduct?"

"Let them go to the devil!" replied M. de Sigoulès, in the same loud voice. "I won't allow one of my near relatives to be insulted in public."

However, after a few minutes the count regained his composure, and began to feel surprised that nothing was said about the finding of the rifle ; but he did not like to introduce the topic himself, and he surmised that Pilois, instead of coming up to announce the discovery to the card-players and chatters, had contented himself with showing the weapon to the four or five members of the club who were walking about the terrace at the time he found it.

The game and the conversation remained suspended, and one could have heard a pin drop, as the saying goes, when the door of the room was noisily flung open and the sub-prefect appeared, much to the surprise of the members, for he seldom visited the club, particularly in the day-time. His arrival created a sensation, more especially as he did not have his usual appearance. He wore his hat perched jauntily over one ear, and carried a walking-stick, while a mocking smile played about his lips. All eyes were riveted upon him ; and the public prosecutor's assessor, although not an admirer of his, stepped forward to accost him, perhaps in order to acquaint him with the affront which he had received from the old count. However, to the great astonishment of the spectators, Charles Vignory passed by the assessor without even honouring him with a look, and walked straight up to M. de Sigoulès, saluting him with a deferential bow, which was very coldly returned. This polite demonstration was so unexpected that several of the people present wondered if the government had been overturned, and if Henri V.\* were seated upon the throne. Vignory did not leave them long in suspense, however. "Monsieur le Comte," he said, in a clear and perfectly audible voice, "I am delighted to have an opportunity to pay my respects to you in public. My official position so far prevented me from doing so, but since this morning I am no longer sub-prefect of Salviac."

This unexpected speech produced a marked effect upon everyone present. It was certainly of a nature to furnish grounds for two very different sup-

\* The late Count de Chambord.—*Trans.*

positions; and the inhabitants of Salviac were in doubt as to whether they ought to congratulate Vignory or condole with him. The assessor, however, found it difficult to repress a smile of satisfaction, for he felt sure of the sub-prefect's disgrace. M. de Sigoulès, surprised, and a trifle shocked, at being thus accosted, coldly replied, "I am delighted to hear that you have a prospect of a more desirable appointment; but however that may be, I presume that you will not regret leaving Salviac."

"I should not regret leaving Salviac under any circumstances, count," replied Vignory, with an insolent glance at the natives; "but I shall regret leaving it the less, as I am about to return to Paris."

"Have you been appointed Prefect of the Seine?" inquired M. Braconne, jestingly.

"No; I am no longer even a sub-prefect."

"What! You have been revoked!"

"I was sure of it," murmured the amiable Bizouin. "We are rid of him at last! What luck!"

"That is not quite the case, though it amounts to about the same thing," replied Vignory, gaily, "I have sent in my resignation."

"Indeed!" exclaimed M. Braconne, greatly astonished.

"Why, yes, and I haven't the slightest doubt but what it will be promptly accepted."

"And why, pray?"

"Because my services did not give satisfaction. It was considered that I was deficient in zeal, and those who possess a surplus stock of that article felt it their duty to denounce me. The minister wishes to get rid of me, and I am delighted to be freed from my burden of responsibility, so you see it is all for the best. I have had quite enough of official life."

"The grapes are too sour!" muttered the assessor through his set teeth.

Vignory must have overheard this remark, for he continued carelessly: "I can understand, of course, a penniless magistrate's anxiety to retain office, but thank Heaven, I no longer have any need of mine. I have just inherited an income of thirty thousand francs from an uncle. It is merely a competency, of course, but it is enough for one to live upon, and I shall no longer be obliged to persecute poor wretches who, in my opinion, are in a measure excusable for their rebellious proclivities. Others will very willingly persecute them in my stead."

"Is it to me that you address that remark?" asked M. Bizouin, endeavouring to assume an air of bravado.

"You are at liberty to take it as you please," said Vignory.

This reply effectually silenced Louis Chancelade's enemy, who decided to go and inform his superior of the sub-prefect's resignation. Accordingly he quietly made his way to the door and disappeared, to the great satisfaction of the whole company. Not that Vignory was particularly popular in Salviac, but he had agreeable manners, and by turning the tables upon M. Bizouin, he had brought all the town's-folk to his side. M. de Sigoulès had not yet overcome his prejudices against this ex-official, but he thought of the advantages he might derive from the change in affairs, and decided that it would be unwise to repulse Vignory's advances. He felt grateful to him, too, for having openly censured the severity of the government, and thought it only right to thank him publicly. "We do not march under the same flag, sir," he began.

"As I am only an ex-official, I no longer have a flag," interrupted Vignory, laughing.

"But when you had one, I was your enemy ; still, that need not prevent me from congratulating you upon the very honourable sentiments you have just expressed."

M. Vignory flushed with delight. Since he had come into his inheritance he was a very different man. He realized that wealth and an ancestral name survived all governments and was eager to win a place in M. de Sigoulès' good graces. "Those were always my sentiments," he rejoined, "though my official position prevented me from manifesting them ; I beg of you to believe, sir, that I shall now be only too happy to put them in practice."

M. Braconne felt strongly inclined to put the laudable views which M. Vignory had just expressed to the test ; but he did not like to ask him a certain favour that would so gratify the old nobleman, in the presence of so many witnesses. He therefore gently pushed the retired sub-prefect into the embrasure of the very window through which the commissary had been shot, and said in a low tone : "If you really wish to oblige Monsieur de Sigoulès, there is a way to do so."

"Pray name it," replied Vignory, eagerly.

"He has been refused permission to see his cousin, Monsieur de Mussidan, though I am unable to understand why. Can you grant it to him ?"

"Not officially. That is the prerogative of the investigating magistrate. But I am still a sub-prefect, in as much as no one has yet been sent to take my place, so I have an undoubted right to enter the prison in company with anyone I please. That brute of a jailer does not yet know that I have sent in my resignation, so he will allow me to do whatever I please, especially as he is afraid he may lose his berth on account of Louis Chancelade's escape. If Monsieur de Sigoulès will accompany me to the prison, I can safely promise him that he shall see Monsieur de Mussidan."

"He would be delighted to do so."

"But this visit must be paid immediately, for Marteau might demur if he heard that I am no longer sub-prefect."

"Well, if there is nothing to detain you here—"

"Nothing whatever. I only came here for the pleasure of announcing my resignation, and of contemplating the bewildered countenances of the town's-folk."

"Then let us take time by the forelock. Still it would be better not to let them see us leave the club together."

"Very well. I will leave first, and wait for you in the street."

M. Braconne thereupon returned to the count, and explained the arrangement that had been made. Vignory had already disappeared, and the game of *bezique* was again proceeding as quietly as if nothing had happened. M. de Sigoulès, it is needless to say, was delighted and at once left the club with M. Braconne. They found Vignory walking up and down the street a short distance off, and he renewed the conversation by sundry protestations of regard, which the count curtailed by saying : "I am already under great obligations to you, sir, and am glad that you no longer serve a government I shall never recognize. As an additional favour would you kindly tell me the truth concerning Louis Chancelade's escape."

"I would gladly tell it you, if I could, but I really don't know it. I can only conjecture, and—this, of course, is only between ourselves—I am of opinion that some one opened the door for him."

"Then you think that the jailer was bribed ?"

"I am more inclined to fancy that the jailer's pretty wife was the culprit."

"She—or the relative who was staying with her?"

"Oh, I can give you full particulars about *her*. She wasn't in the least related to Madame Marteau, and I feel sure she had nothing to do with the escape of the prisoner. She was a young person whom I knew very well in Paris, where at one time she performed on the stage—taking minor parts—and she was seized with an absurd desire to drop down upon me unawares. You can understand my position. I was anxious at the time to retain my office, and so I resolved to get rid of my unexpected visitor at any cost. It happened that she and Madame Marteau had been friends in former years, so I suggested that she should pass herself off as a cousin, and the warder's amiable wife consented to the arrangement. You will understand from this that Madame Marteau and Coralie—Coralie was my visitor's name—knew each other very well. Madame Marteau, you know, was merely an adventuress, before her marriage. As for Coralie, I shall see her in Paris, and as you seem to suspect her of having delivered Chancelade, I shall, if only for amusement, subject her to a careful examination. But here come the judge and the doctor."

The gentlemen mentioned did not appear to be very well satisfied with the result of their visit to the public prosecutor. Their greeting was almost ceremonious, for the presence of the sub-prefect annoyed M. Bourdeille and M. Thiviers, who were astonished to see the Count de Sigoulès in such company. The old nobleman understood the situation, and endeavoured to set his friends at ease by saying: "You can speak without reserve, gentlemen. Monsieur Vignory has just tendered his resignation, and he is quite ready to help us in defending the innocent."

The doctor and his companion exchanged glances, and it was very evident that they hardly believed this statement. "We have had to deal with a man who will not yield to evidence," remarked Dr. Thiviers at last. "The prosecutor pretends that the discovery of the weapon is of no importance whatever. The investigating magistrate does not agree with him, but he can't render a *nolle prosequi* order as regards a prisoner who has absconded."

"Do they know that I am no longer sub-prefect?" inquired Vignory, hastily.

"I think not," said M. Bourdeille.

"Then let us make haste, for the news will soon reach them—and Marteau will immediately receive orders to refuse me admission to the prison."

"That is true," replied M. de Sigoulès. "My dear judge, I will soon see you again, but I must not loiter here. Monsieur Braconne and I are going to see Adhémar." And thereupon he proceeded on his way, leaving Louis Chancelade's defenders convinced that he had lost his senses.

Vignory led the way, and Braconne and the count followed him. On reaching the prison, they instantly perceived that the situation there had changed, as it had done elsewhere. The gate stood wide open, and no one was guarding it.

"Have they all made their escape, like Chancelade?" muttered Vignory. "We will see. Let us go up, gentlemen; I am familiar with the interior of the establishment."

The staircase led straight to the jailer's apartments, and there they found Madame Marteau superintending the packing of several trunks. The

jailer's pretty wife, on perceiving them, quickly drew herself up, smiled upon the Count de Sigoulès, but darted a withering glance at Vignory, who, quite unmoved, exclaimed: "A thousand pardons for disturbing you, madame. We have to deal with Monsieur Marteau, and had I known—"

"My husband has gone to the sub-prefecture," replied Aurélie, drily. "And I am surprised that you did not meet him."

"I come from the club. May I inquire what Monsieur Marteau desired of me?"

"Simply to tell you that his commission had just been revoked by telegraph—the dispatch was brought here from Périgueux by a mounted gendarme. I am glad, moreover, to inform you that the same messenger had a dispatch for you, which he must have left at the sub-prefecture before now. I presume and hope that it is a notice of your dismissal, as well."

"My resignation must have crossed it on the road, then. So you are packing your trunks, madame? Mine have been packed since the day before yesterday; and if, as I suspect, you intend to return to Paris, I shall be delighted to meet you there."

"And I sincerely hope I shall never set eyes on you again. My husband's prospects are ruined, and you are the cause of it. If I hadn't been kind enough to shelter a woman who shamefully deceived me, nothing of this kind would have happened."

"You are very severe upon poor Coralie."

"What! in the presence of these gentlemen, you dare—"

"Oh! I have just told them all about the affair, and they laughed heartily. I will add that I am quite willing to assume the whole responsibility of the joke. If the minister had condescended to question me, before dismissing Monsieur Marteau, I should have told him that neither you nor your husband were to blame—and you know that I said as much to the other authorities on the day after Chanclade's escape. And now if you will be kind enough to tell me how and why our dear friend left us."

"How she left us, I really can't say. She did not even think it necessary to tell me that she was going. She probably felt that she could not remain here any longer after having so deeply injured my husband and myself." Then turning to M. de Sigoulès, Madame Marteau continued: "Excuse me, sir, for dwelling so long upon a foolish affair that can not interest you in the least. You certainly did not come here to see my husband, like the sub-prefect, and if you will kindly explain the object of your visit—"

"Ah! well, madame," began the old nobleman, in evident embarrassment. "Monsieur Vignory encouraged me to hope that your husband would allow me to see my young cousin, Monsieur de Mussidan, but as Monsieur Marteau is absent—"

"He is not only absent, but he is no longer chief-warder, and he is without authority here. As for myself, I am not in a position to enable you to have a private conversation with Monsieur de Mussidan, but it happens that he is just now in the prison-yard. I am in my own apartments, and there is nothing to hinder me from opening this window, which overlooks the yard where he is walking about."

She suited the action to the word, and at a few feet below him M. de Sigoulès perceived Adhémar de Mussidan, who glanced up as he heard the window open. "Why, uncle, is that you?" he exclaimed. "I am very glad to see you; but what the deuce are you doing here? Have you brought an order for my release?"

"Not yet, my dear fellow ; but I hope one will soon come," replied the count. And turning to Madame Marteau, who was standing behind him, he remarked : "He calls me his uncle, you see. That is only because I am thirty-five years older than he is."

Aurélié now stepped forward, and Adhémar saluted her with a wave of the hand, and a smile that furnished Vignory with abundant food for reflection. The conversation was on the point of becoming general, when a subaltern turnkey, who was smoking his pipe in a corner of the yard, tried to put an end to it by taking the prisoner back to his cell. Vignory had burned his ships behind him. He was no longer afraid to interfere, and so in his most commanding voice, he called out to the keeper to let M. de Mussidan alone. The turnkey dared not disobey the sub-prefect, and M. de Sigoulès then continued : "I am exerting myself to the uttermost in your behalf, and some very influential personages promise me that you shall not be detained here much longer. Monsieur Marteau has been recalled to Paris, and as his successor will probably treat you less considerately, I am working hard to insure your speedy release. In the meantime, you will be glad to learn that I am also working on Louis Chancelade's behalf."

"I hope he hasn't been recaptured."

"No, and it is satisfactorily proved now that it was not he who killed the commissary. The weapon used by the murderer has just been discovered—a superb English rifle made by Manton—such as Chancelade never possessed. You have heard of Manton, the best gunsmith in London?"

"Certainly. And what has been done with this rifle?"

"It has been delivered to the investigating magistrate, who will certainly discover its owner."

"An excellent idea ! So you say, my dear uncle, that your Paris friends are trying hard to get me out of prison ? Well, to tell you the truth, I am not sorry ; it will be very dull here soon, with the prospective changes you speak of." As Adhémar spoke thus he tipped Aurélié a wink, and the count who saw him do so felt greatly enlightened. He almost divined the truth as to Louis' escape, and in his turn gave Madame Marteau a grateful glance. However, Adhémar now resumed : "I wish you would send me some cigars, mine are nearly gone. I have been deprived of almost every comfort since Chancelade made his escape, though that, of course, was no fault of mine."

"You shall have a box to-morrow."

"To-morrow my husband won't be here," said Madame Marteau, "and after our departure I can't vouch for anything."

"Then, madame, I shall think of you by way of consolation," replied the prisoner, gallantly.

M. Braconne, who had so far played the part of a silent spectator, now pulled the count by the sleeve and whispered : "I fear we are abusing madame's kindness."

"Besides, if Monsieur Marteau should return we would probably have a rather unpleasant scene with him," said Vignory.

Aurélié did not contradict this assertion, and the count decided to end the interview. "Trust to me, my boy," he cried affectionately, "another week sha'n't elapse without my bringing you some good news."

Having made this seemingly rash promise, he closed the window, and took leave of Madame Marteau, heartily thanking her for her kindness.



Vignory contented himself with bowing even more coldly than M. Braconne, and they all three went out together.

On reaching the street, the sub-prefect felt that he might be in the way, so he had the tact to direct his steps toward the sub-prefecture after the exchange of a few commonplace courtesies.

"My dear Monsieur Braconne," now said the count, "I am beginning to understand the situation, but, in order to fathom it completely, I think I shall be obliged to pay a visit to Paris."

"Like the sub-prefect, the jailer's pretty wife, Mademoiselle Coralie, Vignory's friend, and perhaps Chancelade also. It seems to be decreed that everybody is to go to Paris," exclaimed M. Braconne.

"Excepting you, my friend, whomust remain here to prevent Edmée from going there."

## VII.

CORALIE BERNACHE had returned to Paris after a journey which proved more eventful at the outset than at the close.

She slept for ten hours at the farm of Puyrazeau, and when she awoke, Chancelade's friend drove her to Angoulême, where she took the diligence to the nearest railway station. On the road she had plenty of time to reflect over her strange adventures in Périgord, with Louis Chancelade.

For the first time in her life, she had met a man utterly unlike any she had ever known. He was as young in heart as in years, while his virile beauty lent an irresistible charm to his unassuming but decidedly rough manners. Here was a *man*, at last, and in Coralie's eyes the handsome Parisian exquisites seemed only so many Punchinellos in comparison with this Fra Diavolo of Périgord. Since her return to Paris she was greatly disturbed at not having received any news of the fugitive, but she was on bad terms with those who might perhaps have given her some information. Vignory must be anathematizing her. Aurélie hated her for having compromised her husband, and they had parted in anger. Martial Mouleydier might have written to her, in spite of the trick she had played upon him; but he did not know her address. To whom, then, could she apply to discover what had become of Chancelade? Poor Coralie was reduced to scouring the newspapers for information, but she failed to find in them any intelligence relating to the Périgord insurgents.

A week after her departure from Salviac, she received her luggage, which had been sent back to her without so much as a single line from Vignory, sufficient proof that he was not bestowing much thought on her. Moreover, her admirer Prince Lounine who had gone to Russia had given her no sign of life, though fortunately he had made her some presents before starting. Clara Lasource, Adhémar de Mussidan's old flame, often called to see her, but Coralie refused to try to divert her mind by accompanying her shopping, to which very agreeable recreation Clara usually devoted an hour or two every day. This Clara was a good-looking young woman who had many titled acquaintances, for whose sake she had left the stage. Coralie having told her of her passion for Chancelade, she laughed very heartily at her friend's infatuation. Not being in the least degree romantic herself, Clara Lasource utterly failed to understand how any one could possibly fall in love with a peasant, especially a landless one.

So the days went by, and the Paris carnival gradually drew to a close.

In spite of political events, it had been an unusually brilliant and enjoyable one for everybody excepting Coralie, who still persisted in shutting herself up at home.

However, one Saturday, the third after her return to Paris, as she was lying, dreaming, on the sofa in her drawing room, her friend Clara burst into the apartment, brandishing a newspaper. "Get up, you lazy girl!" she cried. "If you don't, I won't tell you the news I have just read."

"Has there been another revolution?" yawned Coralie. "I can't say that I care if there has."

"Nor do I," retorted Clara.

"Then stop bothering me with your news."

"But, you stupid, it is not a matter of politics. I never read anything on that subject."

"What is it, then?"

"Two paragraphs that interest both you and me very particularly. In the first place, Vignory has been dismissed."

"I shan't cry my eyes out about that. He deserves it. He will return to Paris now, and if he takes it into his head to come and see me, I shall treat him as he treated me."

"Then you would make a great mistake. He has just inherited six hundred thousand francs from an uncle."

"Impossible!"

"He used always to be talking of this uncle, a rich lace-merchant. Don't you remember?"

"Yes; but I didn't believe a word of it."

"It was all true though, for he sent in his resignation before he received his dismissal. They wouldn't accept it, however, as they had resolved to make an example of him."

"Did you see all this in the paper?"

"About his dismissal, yes, but it was his friend Danglars who told me all the rest last night, at the theatre. You know Jules Danglars—the little broker."

"Then it must be true, for he is a particular friend of Vignory's. They were inseparable. However I don't care whether Charlie has come into a fortune or not. It won't make any difference to me. He must hate me as bitterly as I hate him."

"Nonsense, you will soon forget your quarrel. But there is another bit of news that concerns me personally. Listen to this:

"The Prince-President neglects no opportunity of resorting to clemency whenever such a course is not injurious to the interests of the country. After the political disturbances which occurred at Salviac, early in December, the Baron de Mussidan was arrested together with other insurgents. However the hardened foes of public order having been fittingly punished, the government founded by the national will, can afford to pardon some of the misguided persons whose position and antecedents offer sufficient guarantees for the future. Monsieur de Mussidan has suffered an imprisonment of ten weeks' duration. This punishment has appeared sufficient to those in power, and accordingly he has just been set at liberty."

"This is Aurélie's work!" exclaimed Coralie. "She must have begged her general to obtain the baron's pardon, and the general complied with her request."

"Aurélie de Saint-Amour, who was educated at Saint Denis? Do you mean to say that she is in love with Adhémar?"

"She admitted as much to me herself, and I had proof of it on the night when my dear Louis made his escape."

"Yes; you told me about that eventful night. However, I am not at all jealous of the jailer's wife. Adhémar merely started a flirtation with her because he had nothing better to do while he was in prison; now that he is free, he won't trouble himself any more about Madame Marteau. I certainly hope that he will come to Paris soon, and that his first visit will be paid to me."

"Unless it is paid to Aurélic, for she also must be in Paris by this time. As Monsieur Vignory has lost his post, it is almost certain that the chief-warder has lost his as well, and I expect that he and his wife have taken refuge under General de Plancoët's wing."

"That makes no difference to me. Adhémar will return to his allegiance, never fear, and one of these days you shall have the pleasure of dining with him as we used to do in former times."

"It would give me great pleasure. He might be able to tell me what has become of Louis."

"Are you still as infatuated as ever with that penniless schoolmaster?"

"More than ever, and he isn't as poor as you suppose. His father has some property."

"Eight or ten acres of land, I suppose," said Clara, scornfully.

"More than that, my dear. He owns several farms, and a house at Salviac. Besides, it isn't his money I want, it is himself. I would marry Louis Chancelade to-morrow, if he would have me; but, unfortunately, he wouldn't."

"I think it is very fortunate, for you would make a terrible mistake if you married such a fellow. Still, I don't know why I should take the trouble to preach to you, for you will never see him again. I haven't finished reading the article. Just listen to this:

"This clemency is not undeserved, but honest folks may feel at ease. Although Commissary-General Santelli's assassin has succeeded in making his escape from prison he will not fail to receive due punishment for his crime. An active search is being made for him, and there is good reason to believe that he has taken refuge in Paris. He will certainly be arrested before many days have elapsed, and, in the meantime, the officials of Salviac who favoured or permitted his flight have been dismissed."

"The reporter is mistaken," exclaimed Coralie. "Louis is not in Paris. If he were, he would have come to ask me to shelter him. He promised me to do so before leaving me, and I promised him that I would conceal him in my house."

"He was an idiot then. Your trip to Salviac must be known here, and I expect that you have been pointed out to the police, and that your house is being watched. Your admirer must suspect as much, and it is not likely that he will venture into the trap. He will try to escape to some foreign land. But that's enough, let us talk of something more cheerful. You are bored to death I know, and I have come to cheer you up. There's a great masquerade ball at the opera to-night and I have a box. I have invited Danglars and all his set. My admirer, Baron Ormuz, too, will be there, of course. We shall have a delightful evening. I say *we*, for you must come with me."

"Don't depend upon me. I have no heart for amusement."

"You are really too absurd! I don't believe a word of it; and it is perfectly ridiculous for you to pose as a martyr to love, before *me*."

"I am not feigning, I assure you. There are times when I really feel like crying my eyes out."

"Ah, well! you can weep at the ball—in the arms of Danglars, who will console you by giving you the latest news about Charles Vignory."

"If he could give me any news of Louis Chancelade, I wouldn't refuse your invitation—for that is all I care about."

"Who knows? Danglars is always poking his nose into everything, and his friend, Charlie, must have kept him posted about everything that went on down there. But even if he can't tell you anything, you will be sure to have a good time of it. Ormuz will stand a supper and champagne for the whole party, and you can drown your cares in wine. To-morrow, after sleeping upon it, you won't be the same woman. I shall see my old Cora of former days again, and I will never lecture you any more."

"That decides me," said Coralie, smiling.

"Good! Be ready at midnight, and I will call for you in my new brougham. I would ask you to dine with me, but Ormuz has invited himself to dinner with three or four financial magnates, friends of his, and you would be bored to death. It is settled, is it not?"

"Yes, as you insist. Ah! you can boast of your influence over me. I hadn't the slightest idea of going to this ball."

"So much the better. Impromptu affairs are always much more enjoyable. I promise you that you won't repent of your decision. But I must leave you now. I have a host of errands to attend to before I return home. Now, good-bye, and shake off your sadness. Men are not worth worrying about."

"I begin to think you are right," replied Mademoiselle Bernache as she accompanied her friend to the front door, to see her out.

Clara having withdrawn, Coralie seated herself at the piano and began to play some dance music by way of whiling away the time. She was thus engaged when a loud ring resounded through her apartment.

"What if it should be the prince, just returned from Russia?" thought Coralie. "Upon my word! I should not be sorry if it was. His arrival would create a diversion."

Just then, however, her maid opened the door and said: "There is a man here who wishes to see madame."

"A man? Do you mean a tradesman?"

"I think not—but he isn't a gentleman, for he is very queerly dressed. He says he has called at the request of some one madame met at Puyrabot—Puyragot—I hardly caught the name of the place."

"Puyrazeau!" exclaimed Coralie.

"Yes, madame, that's it."

"Show him in quick, then, and admit no one else!"

The maid disappeared, and her mistress, convinced that the visitor was Chancelade, was overcome with astonishment and delight. However, when the door re-opened, she found herself face to face with a tall, dark-complexioned young man, who, although his stature and bearing reminded her slightly of Louis Chancelade, did not resemble him at all in features. He had a soft felt hat in his hand, and wore a sort of ulster that reached nearly to his heels. Had it not been for his frank and pleasant face, one might have taken him for a rather dangerous character, for he carried a strong stick. Indeed, Coralie was beginning to wonder if this stranger were not some emissary from the police, when all at once he quietly said: "I have called at the request of my friend, Chancelade."

"You, sir?" murmured Coralie.

"Yes, madame. You doubt it, I see, and that's only natural, as you do not know me. But you won't doubt me when I have related the particulars of your meeting with Louis, near the Rolling Rock; your evening walk through the fields and the forest, and your arrival at the farm-house, where Louis left you sound asleep, to continue his journey."

"Oh, I believe you now."

"I must tell you who I am, however. Louis left you at Nassou's house, in order that he might join me, having heard, through you, that I was wounded."

"What! was it you who tried to get him out of prison?"

"I was endeavouring to do so. I had climbed upon the prison roof to reconnoitre, but I did not intend to make any attempt to rescue him that night."

"And a warder fired at you! I heard the shot."

"I know it. However, you did your work much better than I did, for you succeeded in getting Louis safely out of the jail. Fortunately, my wound was a mere scratch, and there is scarcely a trace of it left now."

"I am glad to see you cured; but—he?"

"He is quite well."

"And he is in Paris?"

"We reached the city together, but not without considerable difficulty. We had a pretty hard time of it in the woods of Valade, for the gendarmes came close to our hiding-place several times. At last, however, we reached Puyrazeau. Our friend, Nassou, procured some clothes for us, and conveyed us to Angoulême, where we took the diligence—"

"Which took you to the railway line. I came by the same route. How long have you been in Paris?"

"A week."

"And you did not come and see me until to-day! Louis promised me that I should see him as soon as he arrived. I could have concealed him here."

"But not as effectually as we are now concealed. We are staying with one of my friends at Montmartre, where the police won't think of looking for us. While at your house, here, in a fashionable part of the city, we should be sure to attract attention. We are not dressed like gentlemen, and, besides, we should have inconvenienced you," added Jacques, glancing around him.

"Not at all. My apartment is very large, and I live quite alone."

"Chancelade did not know that."

"True, I did not have time to tell him all that, but I will explain my situation when I see him. Why didn't he come here himself to-day?"

"Because he did not dare. However, he did not forget that he owed his escape to you, and he was anxious to thank you. The fact is, he was afraid of getting you into trouble, so he sent me here to reconnoitre, as it were."

"Ah! I understand. He distrusts me on account of Madame Marteau, perhaps. Tell him she is no relative of mine, nor is she even a friend, now. We have quarrelled, and I shall never speak to her again; but I must see Louis, and if he doesn't come here, I shall certainly call upon him."

"That would be very imprudent. You had better arrange to meet somewhere. We very seldom leave Montmartre, but Louis goes out every day to smoke his pipe on the top of the hill behind the mill of La Galette."

"All right. But, no doubt, he won't remain permanently in Paris. What does he intend to do?"

"To go with me to America. We should have started before now, but for lack of money and passports."

"I have some money, and all I possess is at his disposal."

"You are really too kind, but we have enough to live upon until we receive some cash which is to be sent to us from Salviac. However, the bearer of the money can't bring us the passports we need, and that is why I fear our departure will be delayed."

"So much the better. I shall have an opportunity to save Louis again. I have some influential friends, and I will interest them in his behalf. It can easily be proved that he did not kill the commissary, and then the authorities will cease troubling him."

"I doubt it," said Jacques, shaking his head.

"At all events, I must see him," continued Coralie.

"You can see him to-morrow, if you like. You have only to make an appointment through me."

"No; to-night. I have a plan: I am going to a masquerade ball at the Opera House. Let him meet me there."

"At the Opera House?" repeated Jacques, failing to understand.

"Yes; in the Rue le Peletier. Any one can tell him where it is."

"But what do people do there—dance?"

"Oh, you are not obliged to dance. You can walk about or sit with your friends in the boxes, and watch the others dance."

"And you want Louis to go to such a place? You forget that the police have a description of him."

"He need only hire a domino."

"A domino?"

"Yes; a domino is a sort of black silk robe which will cover him from head to foot, and he can procure a mask to conceal his face. I shall go dressed like that."

"Very good. But if you are both disguised in that way, how will you know each other?"

"We must agree upon some mode of recognition. I will pin some pink heather on my domino. Let him do the same, and walk about the passage on the grand tier, between one and two o'clock. I will be there."

"That is a clever idea, but I am by no means sure that Louis will consent."

"Tell him I beg of him to do me this favour. I have many things to tell him—things that concern him personally, as well as his friends, and the enemies he left behind him at Salviac. There have been many changes since he left the town, and it is absolutely necessary for me to see him, so that he may be in a position to profit by the favourable opportunities that now present themselves." Then receiving no reply, Coralie added, quickly: "Besides, I may, perhaps, be able to procure him a passport."

"We need two; still one might do. I can devise a way to join him in America, even if I have to embark as a servant or cook upon some vessel."

"Then I can rely upon his coming to-night?"

"I can not vouch for it, but I will try to persuade him."

"If you will do that, I shall be eternally grateful to you, as I will prove."

"Oh! I need nothing. Personally, I can get out of the scrape without

assistance. The thing is to save Chancelade; and if you do that, I shall be under immense obligations to you. Now that we understand each other, I must go."

"Not until you have told me where you and your friend are staying. You spoke of Montmartre; but—"

"You would like our exact address, but what does that matter? If Louis refuses to attend the ball to-night, you will find him at noon to-morrow on the spot I mentioned behind the mill."

"Very good! I shall go there if I fail to see him to-night."

Thereupon the ex-gamekeeper promptly took his departure, Coralie escorting him to the door, and reminding him of his promise to persuade Louis Chancelade to attend the ball. She had no time to lose in view of completing her preparations before the evening, so she summoned her maid and gave her various instructions in regard to her domino, gloves, and laces, as well as to the bouquet of heather she was to purchase. Heather does not flourish upon the plain of Saint Denis, but Parisian florists produce much finer specimens than were ever culled amid the rocks of Périgord. However, they ask a high price for it, and Coralie almost reproached herself for having chosen a token of recognition which would entail such expense upon Louis. She shrewdly suspected that he had no money to spare, in spite of what his friend Jacques had said, and she felt a little sorry that he should be put to the expense of purchasing such costly flowers and hiring a domino; however, this trifling matter could not mar the pleasure she anticipated from the approaching interview. Punctually at midnight she was ready, and three-quarters of an hour later she entered the brougham of her friend Clara Lasource.

The Opera House in the Rue le Peletier, destroyed by fire on the 29th of October, 1873, would cut a sorry figure beside the magnificent structure which has replaced it, but for three generations of dandies and *dilettanti* it was associated with many delightful memories. Operas were then presented as we never see them presented now; the brightest stars of music and the dance shone there, and such applause rang out as the young men of the present day have never heard.

As the two friends entered the corridor leading to Clara's box, they met a crowd of people, some in dominoes, others in grotesque costumes, and others again in evening-dress, who had gathered round a boisterous and deeply intoxicated individual. The two women did not stop to listen to the chatter; on the contrary, they were doing their best to force their way through the crowd, when a retort attracted Coralie's attention. "You, a sub-prefect!" exclaimed somebody. "You look more like an undertaker's assistant."

On hearing this, Coralie turned and saw that the person affording so much amusement to this motley throng was none other than Charles Vignory, with his hat on the back of his head, his cravat untied, and his moustache out of curl. Clara also recognised him, and laying her hand on her friend's arm, whispered: "You see that he has fallen from power."

"And that he has really come into a fortune," rejoined Coralie. "He has lost no time in beginning to spend it. But let us hurry on. I am terribly afraid that he may speak to us."

Just then he did perceive them, and called out:

"Oh, ho! who is this? Out with the dominoes! This is the jolly boys' passagc. Ladies of society have no business here!"

He even tried to pull Coralie by the sleeve, but she roughly tapped his fingers with her fan.

"And to think I made an appointment with Louis Chancelade to meet me here," she thought as she hastened along. "If Vignory should meet him and recognise him, he would have him arrested. But no; Charlie isn't really bad at heart, and as he isn't a sub-prefect any longer, he won't trouble himself any more about political offenders."

Clara Lasource now hurried her friend on without giving her any time to turn. Vignory evinced no intention of following them, however. He had simply come to the ball to enjoy himself with some friends, and he had dined at the Café de Paris, where he had drunk so much that he could now hardly stand.

Clara's admirer, the Baron d'Ormuz, was already in his box, so busily engaged in surveying the crowded house through his opera-glasses that he scarcely condescended to turn and bow when Coralie was introduced to him. This baron was an Oriental Jew, who had recently taken up his abode in Paris, with several millions, more or less, stolen from the Turkish Government, and who was doing his best to secure a foothold in the fashionable world. He protected Clara, merely because she was known to any number of swells, whose acquaintance he hoped to make through her.

"You are not very polite this evening," she now said. "I introduce you to one of my friends, and you scarcely take the trouble to bow to her."

"Your friend will excuse me, I trust," replied the financier. "I shall be entirely at her service as soon as I have completed my survey. The boxes are well filled, but there are a number of new faces, and nothing annoys me so much as not to be able to give a name to each face."

"Point out those that interest you, and it will be very strange if Coralie and I can't give you the information you desire."

"We shall soon see. Isn't that gentleman with the grey moustache, over there in the box opposite us, General de Plancoët who commands a brigade of cavalry in the French army?"

"The same," replied Coralie.

"Do you know him?" inquired the baron, eagerly.

"Yes; and he is a great admirer of a particular friend of mine."

"Indeed! so you can enter his box and chat with him a little, if you choose?"

"I shall perhaps give myself that pleasure later in the evening."

"He is a very influential person. Ask him if he will help me to secure a railway grant. He shall have his share of the profits."

"I think he will tell me to mind my business; but if it will be any satisfaction to you, I will ask him, all the same."

"Thanks; you are very kind. By the way, I am sure that I have often heard my friend, Prince Lounine, speak of you. The prince is a very agreeable gentleman, and quite an intimate friend of mine. He owes me a large sum of money, but I am perfectly willing to lend him still more. He wrote to me yesterday that he expected to return to Paris next week. But as you seem to know everybody, who is that with the general?"

"A tall, spare old man I never saw before," said Clara, who was not disposed to be left out of the conversation.

"Lend me your glass," said Coralie to the baron.

M. d'Ormuz did as she requested, and having levelled the glass at the general's box, she almost instantly exclaimed: "I know him. Why, I met



him in Périgord. He formerly belonged to the King's Guard and is called the Count de Sigoulès."

"Adhémar's uncle," murmured Clara Lasource.

"And formerly one of the general's comrades," added Coralie.

"Then he, also, must be a very influential man," concluded the baron.

"No; for he is at swords'-points with the government."

"Indeed! Then there is nothing to be gained from him. But who is that young man who just entered the box?"

"It is my turn now," chirped Clara. "That is Monsieur de Mussidan."

"And who is Monsieur de Mussidan?"

"A cousin of the Count de Sigoulès," replied Clara.

"Both unknown here," said the baron, disdainfully. "Provincial nobility, I suppose."

"But of high birth and real gentlemen, or the Marquis de Plancoët wouldn't receive them."

"But the nephew doesn't seem to be one of his friends. See, they are introducing him to the general, and his reception is a very cool one. A curt bow and a silent invitation to take a seat—that's all. The new-comer has a very distinguished air, however."

"And he is very handsome into the bargain, don't you think so?" added Clara, with a sly glance at her friend.

"Not bad-looking, though rather wanting in style. He wears his hat tipped over one ear, like a non-commissioned officer of hussars. Does he belong to the army?"

"No; but it's about the same. He wouldn't hesitate to cut off the ears of any man who tried to carry off his sweetheart."

"How do you happen to know so much about him?"

"Oh, I saw a good deal of him when he was in Paris, a year or two ago. You pretended I didn't know anybody, but now you must congratulate me upon having so many distinguished acquaintances."

"I do, and I see no reason why you shouldn't pay these gentlemen a visit in their box; only as I must be at my office by eight o'clock to-morrow morning, you ladies won't take it amiss, I hope, if I bid you good evening. Business before pleasure, you know."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Coralie, cordially, as the baron bowed and withdrew, and then turning to Clara, she added: "Monsieur d'Ormuz certainly has some good qualities. For instance, he isn't jealous."

"Not of Adhémar. But, to tell the truth, I have not quite decided to renew my acquaintance with Mussidan. The newspaper told the truth in saying that he had been released; but that won't restore him the fortune he has squandered."

"Nonsense! he will inherit the fortune of his uncle, the count."

"The count is really his cousin, not his uncle, and he looks to me as if he would live a hundred years. Besides, it is by no means certain that Adhémar still cares for me. Since he has engaged in politics, he may have thrown all thoughts of love to the winds. I shall soon know, however, for I intend to walk past his box, and he will have to come and speak to me. But look! young Danglars and his set have just come in. Danglars is disguised as a red Indian, one of his companions as a soldier, another as a nurse. He didn't warn me of that. The idea of his supposing I should receive them here in such costumes!"

"Do they know the number of your box?" asked Coralie.

"Yes; I was stupid enough to tell Danglars."

"Then let us run off before they see us. They are quite capable of bringing Vignory here, and I wouldn't meet him this evening for anything on earth."

Clara thought the suggestion a good one, and the two friends hastened out of the box. Clara was more anxious to talk to Mussidan than she was willing to admit, and Coralie knew that the hour appointed for her interview with Louis Chancelade was fast approaching. So they decided to separate for the time being. "Where shall we meet?" inquired Coralie when they reached the door leading into the lounge.

"In our box; and at three o'clock, we will finish the night with a supper in the Grand Quinze."

"I don't promise to be present at the supper," responded Coralie, as she waved her friend a gay good-bye, and mingled with the crowd, Clara on her side starting in the direction of the general's box.

As Coralie was anxious not to miss Louis, she walked up and down the passage as agreed upon, and finally took her stand near the outer door of the lounge. This was the best possible place to watch the crowd, but it was much too conspicuous for a woman wearing a domino, as Coralie soon discovered, for the gentlemen who passed her often paused to pay her compliments, and at times she had considerable difficulty in getting rid of them. Vignory had disappeared, very fortunately. It was more than probable that he had entered the auditorium, where he must have met his friend Danglars; however, he might return at any moment, and Coralie was more anxious than ever to avoid him. Accordingly, she was about to resume her promenade, when a tall fellow, dressed like a market porter, seized her rudely about the waist, thereby extorting a cry of indignation, followed by some sharp words. "You scamp," cried Coralie. "Isn't there any gentlemen here to teach you a lesson?"

Two or three by-standers promptly sprung to the rescue, and the fellow was roughly hustled down the staircase. Coralie watched these summary proceedings with great satisfaction, and was about to move away, when her eyes fell upon a man in a domino who was standing near her, and examining her with singular persistency. This person was not Chancelade, for he wore no sprig of heather, and his massive figure bore no resemblance to that of Edinée's brother. As to his face, she could not catch a glimpse of it, for he was very closely masked. Coralie experienced a sensation of fear, though she would have been at a loss to explain why; and resolving to give this stranger the slip, she hastened in the direction of the general's box, with the intention of retracing her steps by-and-bye, and then continuing her promenade until she met Chancelade.

She knew where to find M. de Plancoët's box, and when she reached it, she could not resist the temptation to glance through the peephole in the upper part of the door.

Adhémar de Mussidan, the general, and M. de Sigoulès were still there, and with them sat a lady in a black domino, in whose conversation they all seemed to be deeply interested. Coralie would have been glad to hear what this lady was saying, but she was talking in a very subdued tone; besides, she (Coralie) could not remain with her face to the peephole, so she turned, and felt very frightened on perceiving that the masked man whom she had tried to avoid was now close behind her.

Why had he followed her? and whom had she to deal with? With a detective? This thought troubled her so much that she fled as fast as she could, but although she made several sudden turns, like a hunted hare,

mingling with merry groups, and occasionally pausing in some dark corner, she did not succeed in eluding her pursuer. Under other circumstances, she would not have followed this course. On such occasions the Opera House is full of men, who amuse themselves by following a woman without venturing to address her; besides, so far as she herself was concerned, she had nothing to fear from the police; but Louis was coming, and Louis was a proscribed man. Now if the fellow following her was really a detective as she supposed, he would not fail to notice the signal, or, in other words, the sprigs of heather pinned upon her domino and Louis'. He might imagine that these flowers were indications of some conspiracy against the state—such people see that in everything—and then he would keep a careful watch over the suspicious parties.

Suddenly, however, she recollected that this spy had not begun to follow her until after he had heard her call for protection against the rude fellow who had insulted her, and from this fact she concluded that he had recognised her voice. So he must have met her before, and frequently, for a person does not recollect the voice of a woman whom he has only met once or twice. Now as he knew her so well, he must also know Chancelade; and as she had never had any dealings with the Parisian police, and he must be a detective purposely despatched from Salviac; he had probably been sent to Paris in search of the fugitive; and as her sudden disappearance must have created quite a sensation in the town, he had perhaps been told to keep an eye on her as well. Coralie now resolved not to speak another word for fear of betraying herself a second time; but she was determined not to leave the ball, as by doing so, she would miss her opportunity of seeing Louis. She finally decided to return to the lounge, hoping to escape the detective in the crowd, and she was about to act upon her determination, when she saw the Count de Sigoulès and his cousin leave General de Plancoët's box and come towards her arm in arm. In fact, they passed so near her that she distinctly heard the count say to his companion: "The jailer's pretty wife has really too much assurance."

These words were so significant that Coralie instantly resolved to hear what would follow, and quite forgetting that the spy was dogging her own heels, she proceeded to follow these gentlemen, who, as they had quite failed to notice her, did not hesitate to speak very freely. She thus heard M. de Mussidan reply: "Why do you censure our pretty friend? For coming to the ball without her husband? She certainly could not bring the brute with her!"

"Oh, no! I don't blame her for that; but I distinctly saw her slip a note into your hand, a note which you hastily concealed in your pocket. I ought to add, however, that had I been in your place I should have done exactly as you did."

"Then I fail to see why you blame either of us."

"Nor do I; only, after the general's intervention in your behalf, I think he is entitled to some consideration, and you know how attached he is to that Madame Marteau. However, you might render him a real service by opening his eyes to the woman's real character before he compromises himself irretrievably. Between ourselves, it seems to me that he has greatly degenerated since my last visit to Paris. It was bad enough for an old royalist like him to go over to the Bonapartists, but to dance attendance upon the wife of a common jailer is something dreadful."

"Has she altogether left her husband?"

"I think so. At least, since her return to Paris, she has taken up

her abode in some handsome apartments in the neighbourhood of the Madeleine."

"But what has become of Martean then, the suave and gentlemanly Marteau? The general could not prevent his dismissal, but he certainly can't have left him to starve. To lose his place and his wife at the same time would be really too hard even upon a jailer."

"Plancoët told me that he had found a situation for him in the police service—the detective department."

"Marteau is certainly well fitted for that vocation," said M. de Mussidan.

"True, and I am very much afraid that he has been set upon poor Chancelade's track."

"Marteau knows him by sight, that's true; and he must hate him intensely, as he lost his position in consequence of his escape. It was not his fault, however. It was his wife who ought to have been punished, not he."

"That is the way of the world, my dear fellow. You can now realise the consequences of marrying an unprincipled woman."

"Unquestionably. But tell me, haven't you any news of Chancelade?" asked Adhémar.

"None whatever. All I know is, that he left Périgord with the intention of going to America. I don't know what has become of him, but I am afraid that he is lingering in Paris. If so, he will certainly be arrested and very soon."

Coralie had not missed a word of this interesting conversation. She shivered when she heard M. de Sigoulès predict Louis Chancelade's speedy arrest; and her heart sunk within her when she learnt what was Pierre Martean's new profession; she knew that the ex-jailer must feel an intense hatred for his former prisoner; and, finally, it occurred to her that the masked man who had followed her so persistently about the passage might be none other than Aurélie's odious husband. Her consternation greatly increased, when, on turning round at this juncture she perceived that this very man was only a few steps from her, and that he was manœuvring to get still nearer. The two cousins were still engaged in their confidential conversation, and the spy would soon be within hearing.

"Even if they capture Chancelade, I defy them to convict him," remarked Adhémar.

"Yes," replied the count; "it is true there is that Manton gun. But they haven't succeeded in discovering its owner yet, and until they do, Chancelade must necessarily be placed in a very unenviable position. But let us talk a little about your own affairs, my dear Adhémar. You are out of prison at last, thanks to me and the general. I have brought you to Paris, and I shall stand by you until the end. You are my only heir, and I shall let you have a suitable allowance, though I have less money than usual at my disposal this year—the harvest having proved a failure—but that will not prevent me from assisting you. Only, tell me what you intend to do. You have squandered your own belongings, and you have no means of gaining a livelihood. Paris is no place for you, and you have no fondness for a country life."

"I have half a mind to enlist in the African Chasseurs."

"That would do very well if we had our rightful king."

"I should be serving France, all the same."

"You are right. At all events, it would be better than loafing about the

streets; and as you have come to this conclusion, I advise you to enlist immediately."

"I intend to do so very soon; but, first of all, I should like to feel better satisfied concerning Louis Chancelade."

"You seem to take a great interest in that young man, though he isn't on our side, and though you scarcely know him."

"That's true; but he is innocent, and if he were convicted, I should despise myself for accepting a pardon I did not deserve, as I was the leader of the insurgents."

These last words must have reached the ears of the masked man, who had finally succeeded in getting near the cousins, and Coralie realised that it was time to warn them. Stepping quickly to Adhémar's side, she slipped her arm through his, and compelling him to lean towards her, she said softly but hurriedly: "Take care. There is a detective right behind you. I know that you have nothing to fear, but if you wish to save Louis Chancelade, not another word about him. The spy who is now listening to your conversation is searching for him."

Mussidan, greatly surprised, was about to reply, but Coralie disengaged her arm, and disappeared in the crowd before he could try to detain her. At the same time, as a kind action is always rewarded, she found herself suddenly freed from the spy she had so long been trying to escape. The appointed hour having now come, Coralie was anxious to reach the passage on the first tier as soon as possible; but, unfortunately, it seemed to be decreed that obstacles should rise up before her at every step, for at that moment she encountered Clara Lasource, who whispered: "Would you believe it? I missed Adhémar. Some friends I met dragged me into their box, and when I managed to make my escape from them, Adhémar had left."

"He is here in the lounge with his cousin Sigoulès. Go there, and you will certainly meet them," replied Coralie, quickly, as she hastened on, and finally succeeded in entering the passage. Her trials were not yet over, however. Vignory, after making a tour of the auditorium had returned to his starting point in company with a gentleman whom Mademoiselle Bernache little expected to meet, and who was none other than Martial Monleydier. The young provincial cut a sorry figure in this brilliant assemblage; his dress-coat was too tight, his white cravat seemed to be strangling him, and his patent leather boots were torturing his feet. Bewildered by the noisy confusion, blinded by the glare of the countless lights, he looked like an owl who had strayed into the sunlight. He almost regretted that his father had consented to furnish him with funds for a trip to Paris. To crown his misfortunes, he had unexpectedly met the ex-sub-prefect of Salviac, and had conceived the unlucky idea of speaking to him. Vignory, who now detested Martial for having mixed him up in Chancelade's affair, was heaping opprobrious epithets upon him, calling him fool and bumpkin, and even spy, with such a vigour that the bystanders evinced an inclination to pummel the unfortunate Martial. Coralie would have thoroughly enjoyed this scene, had she not been mindful of her appointment, and felt a little alarmed to see all these Salviac people at the Opera House. They would not be likely to recognise Chancelade behind his mask, but he would recognise them, and might think that she had only been setting a trap for him in enticing him to this ball. In fact, she almost began to hope that Louis would not come.

Just then, however, there appeared at the top of the stairs a tall gentle-

man attired in a black domino, with a sprig of pink heather upon his breast. This new-comer must certainly be Chancelade. He was advancing slowly, like a man who sets foot in a strange place for the first time, and who does not know which way to go ; his figure towered above the crowd, and as it could not fail to excite remark if he walked down the passage, Coralie hastened forward to warn him of his danger. Unfortunately, Vignory had finished with Mouleydier, who had just taken flight, and the ex-sub-prefect, now on the look out for another victim, perceived the two dominoes at the moment they met, and promptly attacked them. "Look at the pink heather !" he cried, in a voice husky with liquor. "Where did you gather it, my little dears ? It looks very much out of place here, it is altogether too countrified. Haven't you ten francs between you to purchase two respectable bouquets of a florist ?"

Coralie had caught hold of Chancelade's arm, and was trying to drag him along ; but he resisted, and looked searchingly at Vignory. His eyes flashed ominously through his mask, and poor Coralie detected his desire to rush upon the ex-sub-prefect. "Come with me, I beg of you," she pleaded, in a voice that trembled with excitement. "I have a box where we shall be safe."

Chancelade finally allowed himself to be led away ; but Vignory, who would not give up his prey, followed them, keeping up a running fire of sneering remarks. Coralie felt Chancelade's arm tremble beneath her restraining hand, and their walk seemed interminable. They finally reached the box, however, and Vignory decided to beat a retreat, though not until he had indulged in one more jibe.

When the door was closed, Coralie breathed more freely, but the situation was rather embarrassing, and she did not know how to begin the conversation. Chancelade solved the difficulty, however, by saying, rather coldly : "My friend Jacques told me that you wished to see me, madame. I sent him to your house to thank you, and also to keep my promise that I would inform you of my arrival in Paris ; however I deeply regret that I consented to come here to-night."

"Because you have met that odious sub-prefect who had you arrested ? Had I known that he intended to come here I should never have made this appointment with you. But he can not harm you now. He has been removed from office."

"He can denounce me."

"He didn't recognise you. There is no danger so far as he is concerned, but the old keeper of the prison is here."

"Have you seen him ?"

"I have not seen his face, for he is masked ; but I am sure that it was Marteau who followed me about so persistently a short time ago. He also has lost his berth, but he has entered the detective service, and he is the more to be feared as he just overheard a conversation about you. He heard the Count de Sigoulès tell his cousin, Monsieur de Mussidan, that you must be concealed in Paris."

"What ! are they also at this ball ?"

"It seems to me that all Salviac is here. Monsieur de Mussidan was recently released, and his cousin, who secured his pardon, has brought him to Paris. Even that young rascal, Mouleydier, who denounced you, was in the passage only a moment before your arrival. And, look ! do you see that box opposite you on the other side of the house ? Well, the gentleman there is the Marquis de Plancoët, and the lady is

Madame Martean, the general's divinity, and Monsiennr de Mussidan's deliverer."

"I am very grateful to you, madame, for all this valuable information, and I think the best thing I can do is to leave a place in which all my enemies seem to have congregated."

"You forget that you have a friend who is ready to help you—your comrade must have told you so."

"Jacques told me that you might possibly procure us the passports we need."

"I hope so. I know a Russiau who refuses me nothing. He is not in Paris now, but he will be here in a few days' time, and he is such an important personage that he will have no difficulty in obtaining from his ambassador in Paris a passport containing a personal description corresponding with yours. Give me a week, and I will pledge myself to secure you this passport."

"It seems more than likely that I shall be obliged to remain here several months for want of a chance to leave the country."

"Oh! I shall be sure to succeed. But it may be necessary for me to see you again, and your friend Jacques refused to tell me where you live."

"It was at my request that he did so."

"So you distrust me?"

"No, madame; but Jacques and I shall not always be alone in the lodgings we occupy. I expect my sister."

"Ah! I understand," said Mademoiselle Bernache, sadly, realising that Chancelade did not care to let Edmée make the acquaintance of a person like herself.

"However, I can call at your house," resumed Louis, more courteously, as if to efface this impression, "and we can then tell each other any news we may have heard."

"If this arrangement had been proposed to me by your friend this morning, I should have agreed to it at once; but now I fear that my house is watched. It certainly will be watched if this jailer who has turned spy recognised me just now; and I should never forgive myself if I were the cause of your ruin. Jacques tells me, however, that you climb to the top of Montmartre every day at about noon. Could I not meet you there?"

"Certainly, madame. And yet, if this man should see you leave home, and follow you—"

"I shall take my precautions; besides, I shall not venture to meet you until I have satisfied myself that there is no one mounting guard in the Rue Mogador; but I thank you for not refusing to see me. If you knew how much I have suffered from suspense since you left me at Puyrazeau—"

"What do those people want?" interrupted Chancelade, to the great vexation of Coralie, who had at last succeeded in giving the interview a sentimental turn. As he spoke, he pointed to a band of grotesquely attired young men who were capering about just under the box, shouting and gesticulating all the while in the most frantic manner. Their cries and gestures were evidently addressed to the occupants of the box, and Coralie, on glancing down, recognised among them the young broker Danglars, whom Clara Lasource had invited to sup with her—Danglars, the boon companion of Charles Vignory, who could not be far off. "They seem to be calling you," continued Chancelade.

They were calling her, in fact; for, above the music of the lancers, which had just come into fashion, there sounded loud calls of "Co-ra-lie! Co-ra-

lie !” Then, suddenly, the disorderly fellows, with Danglars at their head, attempted to make their way into the box by climbing upon one another’s shoulders.

Chancelade rose, and without reflecting on the unfortunate consequences of a conflict, prepared to give them a warm reception. Coralie, who was more prudent, hastily took refuge at the rear of the box, and said to her rather rash protector : “ Do you want to ruin yourself ? If you get into any difficulty with these idiots, you will all be taken to the station-house, where you will be asked to give your names. This you would refuse to do, of course, and as a natural consequence, you would be sent to prison. Come, quick. We still have time to escape before they can cut off our retreat by the passage. Come, I say ! ”

Chancelade realised the wisdom of this advice, and followed Coralie out of the box. As soon as she saw Louis at her side, she started down the passage, but suddenly she found herself confronted by the disguised detective, from whom she had escaped some time before. He was now standing in the middle of the passage, effectually blocking the way. However, Chancelade did not stop for ceremony ; pushing the fellow on one side, he drew Coralie along after him. “ It is he, the spy ! ” whispered Made-moiselle Bernache, as they hurried on. “ Tear off your spray of heather, and let us get away from here as soon as possible. He will probably follow us ; but once outside, we can escape him by taking a cab.”

Chancelade realised that there was nothing else to be done, so he crumpled up the heather in his hand, and literally flew down-stairs after Coralie. On reaching the first landing, he turned and saw that the spy was still following them.

“ All right,” thought Louis ; “ I will see my companion safely to a cab, and, by-and-bye, if this rascal continues to dog my footsteps, I will treat him as he deserves. Jacques must be down-stairs, and if we find that this fellow is really that scamp Marteau, we will break his head for him.”

This plan differed widely from Coralie’s. Anxious to increase Chancelade’s obligations to herself, she hoped to take him home with her and secrete him there, at least until the next day. To do this it was absolutely necessary that they should elude the vigilance of the detective, and Coralie relied upon the crush that generally takes place round about the entrance of the Opera House. At this moment, however, she perceived Jacques standing under the portico in front of the theatre. It was not yet two o’clock ; and in those days, as now, it was fashionable to arrive late ; so that a crowd of gentlemen came in just as Coralie and Chancelade reached the door. However, the former, who had sharp eyes, distinguished Jacques through the throng. He was leaning upon his cane, and the police had no doubt allowed him to stand there, because they mistook him for a detective ; in fact, although he did not resemble one in physiognomy, he certainly did in costume. This fact struck Coralie, and suggested to her a plan which might prove successful, providing it was quickly and cleverly executed. She recollected that Pierre Marteau could not recognise Jacques, as the latter had never been an inmate of the prison, and, accordingly, Jacques might safely enter into conversation with Aurélie’s husband. She therefore walked straight to Chancelade’s devoted friend, and as she passed him hastily, she whispered : “ The man who is following Louis and me is the former keeper of the Salviae prison. Manage to stop him, and detain him until we can get into a cab. He now belongs to the detective service. Try to make him believe that you are one of his colleagues.”



Jacques did not understand at first, and he might have remained completely mystified, had he not noticed the spray of heather pinned upon Coralie's domino. At sight of this he quickly divined the situation, and as he was endowed with remarkable self-possession, he gave no start of surprise, Coralie passing on without anyone noticing that she had even spoken to him.

Chancelade himself was scarcely aware of the fact. He recognised his friend, but he was not so imprudent as to speak to Jacques under the very eyes of the detective who was so close upon his heels. On the contrary, he merely made a sign which meant: "Wait for me."

In presence of these conflicting orders, Jacques had the good sense to obey the more important of them; while Coralie, feeling that she could safely rely upon the intelligence and courage of the brave young fellow whom she had seen on the roof of the Salviac prison, determined to complete the work she had so well begun. Seizing Chancelade tightly by the arm, she hurried him on, saying as she did so: "I have just warned your friend. He will do whatever may be necessary to rid us of this man. Quick, get into a cab with me, or all will be lost!"

Chancelade realised that this was no time for argument, so he yielded. However, they were obliged to pause to allow a crowd of maskers to pass by, and the spy took advantage of this enforced delay to approach them stealthily, Jacques, on his side, taking his stand at the foot of the steps.

The critical moment had come. Everything now depended upon Coralie's presence of mind. Perceiving a cab, from which some people were alighting, in front of the theatre, she rushed forward, still holding Chancelade, gave the driver a fictitious address, and at once sprang into the vehicle, followed by her companion. Behind this cab there was a second one, from which some other people were alighting, and the spy ran towards it, with the evident intention of following the vehicle which was about to bear Chancelade and Coralie away.

The idea was a capital one, but he did not foresee an obstacle that now presented itself. As he hastened down the steps, he came into violent collision with Jacques. The shock made him reel, whereupon the poacher, while pretending to make strenuous efforts to steady him, dexterously tripped him up, throwing him flat upon his back, amid the shouts of the bystanders. The trick was a success, for Coralie's cab was already rolling swiftly towards the boulevard; however, Jacques was not satisfied. He was the first to assist the detective to rise, and was profuse in his apologies, which were most ungraciously received. The detective swore lustily, and evinced a decided inclination to thrash the author of his misfortunes. Jacques had his reasons for keeping his temper, but he entered into an argument with his would-be assailant, in order to prolong the conversation, and a crowd soon gathered around them. A policeman came up to disperse these people, most of whom yielded to his authority, but when the man in the domino was in his turn ordered to move on, he curtly replied that he had a right to remain there; and in proof of his assertion, he displayed something which Jacques was unable to catch a glimpse of, though it seemed to be satisfactory, for the policeman insisted no further. Jacques, who had kept on one side during the controversy, now approached, and said, as his victim turned, growling, away: "Excuse me, comrade, but now that I know who you are, I feel even more sorry for having been the innocent cause of your accident."

"Hold your tongue!" was the surly reply.

"Don't be angry. I belong to the detective service like yourself. You don't know me, however, because you no doubt belong to the political brigade."

"I belong to nothing of the kind, and once more I tell you to let me alone."

"You do very wrong to treat a comrade like this. You needn't tell me that we don't sail in the same boat. I saw you show your card to the policeman just now. Besides, I didn't need that proof to convince me. Seeing you so anxious to follow those two persons who went away in that cab, I guessed that you must belong to the service. You have missed them—"

"And it was all your fault. If you hadn't tripped me up, I should have caught them up in the other cab."

"I did not do it intentionally; besides, I am able to atone for the inconvenience I have caused you. I took the number of their cab. Oh! it's a habit I've taken ever since I entered the service, and I have always found it a very useful one. Knowing the number, it would be an easy matter to learn where the driver has taken the parties you wanted to follow, but, of course, I have no desire to interfere with you."

"Then tell me the number."

"So you at last admit that we are colleagues, eh? Ah! well, now come and take a drink with me, like a good fellow, and then I'll furnish you with the means of finding those parties."

"My costume prevents it. I can't enter a wine-shop with this con-founded thing on my back."

"To say nothing of the mask that would prevent you drinking. But just step into that by-street over yonder. You can easily take off all that flummery there, roll it up in a bundle, and carry it under your arm. There is nothing to prevent you from resuming your disguise by-and-bye, if your duties at the ball are not yet over."

"I have nothing further to do there. I have been instructed to discover a person accused of murder, and I somehow took it into my head that he would attend this ball to-night. I wasn't mistaken. I recognised the woman who was with him by her voice. She is the person who helped him to escape from the prison where he was confined."

"Ah yes! the prison of a small provincial town, eh? I have forgotten the name."

"Salviac, in Périgord. But how did you learn all that?"

"A description of the murderer was given to all of us, though the affair isn't exactly our business, the crime being a political one. I tell you this, to prove to you that some credit is due to me for not claiming a share, for a very liberal reward will be given to the person who arrests the murderer."

"I will hand the whole reward to you, if you will put me in a position to find the fellow."

"That would be too much. We will share the spoil, and, if you like, I will help you in searching for the fellow. But don't let us linger here any longer. We shall be sure to attract attention."

This conversation had taken place on the pavement in front of the theatre, amid a noisy throng. Jacques now led his companion to the Rue Rossini, then known as the Rue Pinon, and here Chanceclade's pursuer removed his mask and domino, as there was no one in sight. Jacques had never seen the ex-jailer, but Louis had described him so perfectly that he had no difficulty whatever in recognising Pierre Marteau. All that Jacques now

had to do was to start Aurélie's husband on a wrong scent. "I will detain you no longer, my dear comrade," he said pleasantly. "The number of the cab was 954. You can obtain the driver's address at the prefecture, and if you will give me yours, I will keep you informed about whatever progress I may make in helping you to capture your man."

"I live at No. 81 Rue Saint-Louis," replied the ex-jailer, after some hesitation, "and my name is Marteau. Tell me your name as well, and be kind enough to excuse me from drinking with you this evening. I'm not thirsty."

"As you like, comrade. My name is Truffier. Inquire at police-head-quarters, and they will tell you where I live. You may rest assured that you can depend upon me. But I must now return to my post in the vestibule. Good-bye." Then as Aurélie's foolish husband walked away, Jacques turned upon his heel muttering: "I caught you, but you didn't catch me, old fellow. Search for the driver of No. 954. You will be none the wiser for whatever he may be able to tell you."

## VIII.

WHILE Louis Chancelade was meeting with these exciting adventures in Paris, his sister Edmée was arriving there after undergoing all the sorrows of isolation. She had spent a fortnight without receiving any tidings of the two fugitives, and the frequent visits of her neighbour, M. Braconné, had not sufficed to console her for their absence. She even took a decided dislike to the worthy man who so persistently preached resignation to her. She preferred the encouraging advice which the Count de Sigoulès gave her, every Saturday, but she was hardly inclined to follow it. However, after the release of Adhémar de Mussidan, the count accompanied his cousin to Paris, having previously introduced him to Edmée, who was greatly surprised at the clemency shown to the young nobleman by a government which displayed such vindictiveness as regards her brother. In spite of the old count's many protestations of friendship, Edmée placed no reliance in him in the matter of justifying Louis; on the contrary, she felt that she could only depend upon her own efforts. She could have trusted Jacques, but he was no longer there, having accompanied Louis to Paris, and she suspected that they neither of them wrote to her for fear of betraying the secret of their hiding-place; however, Louis, instead of addressing his letters to her, could have sent them under cover of Dr. Thiviers who was so cautious and so kindly disposed towards both the brother and the sister. At last, one market-day, a peasant woman who had served as Jacques' messenger on several previous occasions, called at Edmée's house, with a note which a young fellow of Lesguillac, the same who had acted as the guide of the two fugitives, had just received from Paris. This note would have proved an enigma to any stranger, but Edmée understood it perfectly. It read as follows: "Our supplies are nearly exhausted, and we should like to start with you. Ask the ironmonger in the High Street for the address of his relative, Lucien Doradour, and come as soon as you can."

This, no doubt, meant that the two friends were residing under the roof of Lucien Doradour, a native of Salviac, who had left that town ten years previously, and was said to have amassed ample means. Edmée lost no time in making the necessary inquiries; but, unfortunately, the ironmonger was unable to give her the desired information, having entirely lost

sight of his distant cousin. He thought he lived somewhere at Montmartre, outside the Paris boundaries, but this was all he knew. However, Edmée promptly decided to start without the address, feeling sure that any place in the suburbs of Paris could not be much larger than Salviae, and that she would only have to take up her abode there, to find the people she was seeking. She did not consult anybody. One fine morning, with five hundred louis on her person, she took the diligence for Périgueux, in order to deceive such inhabitants of Salviae as might hear of her departure. From Périgueux, where no one knew her, she went to Bordeaux, and thence she repaired to Paris, this roundabout way of travelling having taken up fully four days.

She was fortunate to have as a travelling companion from Bordeaux, a widow lady who was still young and attractive, and whose face and manners impressed Edmée very favourably. They soon became well acquainted, and Mademoiselle Chancelade learnt that this lady intended to stay at Montmartre at a boarding-house, which she had patronized during a previous visit to Paris. This being the case, it was speedily decided that they should both repair to the same establishment. Still, in spite of the friendship that sprung up between them, they were both extremely reticent in regard to personal matters. As we have just said, the lady was a widow, and still wore mourning for her husband. Her name was Bastide, her family resided at Bordeaux, and she was going to Paris, she said, to obtain possession of some property that had been bequeathed to her. Edmée, who did not wish to give her real name, found herself, for the first time in her life, obliged to tell a falsehood. She had invented a story which she proposed to repeat to everyone until she found her brother, and this story was not only simple but very plausible. She was a Mademoiselle Védrières, a native of Bergerac, where her mother kept a boarding-school, and she was going to Paris to await the arrival of a wealthy English family which had engaged her as governess.

The small hotel, or rather boarding-house, where Madame Bastide intended to lodge, was really a very respectable place, though most of the inns in the neighbourhood were rather dingy and disreputable. Montmartre, however, was not then what it has since become, a hot-bed of riot and disorder, and a refuge for disreputable characters of both sexes. It was still the abode of honest citizens, and frugal clerks who preferred to live there, just outside Paris, in order to escape the payment of heavy taxes. It was much less thickly populated than is the case nowadays, and nearly all the houses had gardens, the summit of the height seized by the allies in 1814 being still a barren waste.

In those days, one could enjoy a fine view from every window, and the modest little room occupied by Edmée overlooked a superb panorama; the whole city of Paris and the heights of Chatillon beyond. The boarding-house, which was kept by a Madame Gouverneur, the widow of a cavalry officer killed in Algeria, had once been a private lunatic asylum, and its tranquillity and seclusion were very pleasing to Edmée; there was a large garden, shaded with tall chestnut trees, that reminded her a little of Périgord.

The inmates of the house, and a few persons of the neighbourhood, dined together at a modest *table-d'hôte*, and Edmée and her new acquaintance, Madame Bastide, agreed to meet there every evening, each of them remaining free to employ her time as she pleased during the day. Madame Bastide had to see some lawyers, so she said, and the so-called Mademoiselle Védrières pretended that she would be obliged to call at the English

Embassy every morning to ascertain if the family she was expecting had arrived from London. What she really intended to do was to explore Montmartre, in order to discover the whereabouts of Lucien Doradour. She might have asked Madame Gouverneur if she knew anyone of that name, but the inquiry might have aroused unpleasant suspicions, so she decided to institute a search herself, and question doorkeepers, and even passers-by, feeling quite confident that she would eventually succeed in her purpose. She started out the very next day after her arrival, and soon discovered that her task was not likely to prove an easy one. To begin with, she found that Montmartre was a much larger place than she had supposed. The hill formed the centre, and its summit was very sparsely populated, but all around there was a net-work of irregular streets spreading over an enormous area. Edmée courageously began by exploring that part of the locality nearest to Paris, going from house to house, and inquiring if M. Doradour lived there. Some houses had no doorkeepers, and she could find no one to question; at others, she met ill-humoured old women, who received her very ungraciously. Not one of them could give her the slightest information. The friend who had sheltered the two fugitives, seemed to be utterly unknown in this neighbourhood.

At length, after thoroughly exploring this part of the place, Edmée naturally came to the conclusion that he must reside on another side of Montmartre. She could not continue her search that day, for she had already walked several hours, and was very weary; however, before returning to the boarding-house, she resolved to climb to the top of the hill, whence she could obtain a comprehensive view of the locality. She wished to become conversant with its topography before resuming her voyage of discovery.

The ascent was long and difficult, but she finally reached the summit. She now beheld new and untried lands; the Plain of Saint Devis in front of her, the heights of Belleville on her right, the Mont Valérien on her left, and below her on every side a crowd of dwellings, among which must certainly be the house which she had been vainly seeking since the morning.

The view was so extensive, and the houses so numerous, that the young girl felt well-nigh discouraged. How was she to discover the two fugitives in the human ant-hill at her feet? Her illusions vanished one by one, and with tears in her eyes, she began to think regretfully of her peaceful home at Salviac, where she had already received tidings of the absent ones, and where she might have again heard from them, whereas now, she might be obliged to spend months near them, but without once seeing them. However, how could she now return to Salviac, where she would be obliged to relate the incidents of her fruitless journey to M. Braconné and Dr. Thiviers, who had both tried so hard to turn her from her purpose? It would be better to persevere until she had lost all hope of success. Just then a faint sound aroused her from her sorrowful meditations, the sound of footsteps, and turning quickly, she saw her new friend, Madame Bastide, but a few paces from her. Edmée cordially extended her hand to the young widow, and said, pleasantly: "The same whim seems to have seized hold of both of us, for you also have come, I suppose, to enjoy the magnificent view?"

"Not exactly," replied the widow. "The view is superb, but I have long been familiar with it. It was really a desire for solitude that brought me here, for there are moments in life when one needs an opportunity for reflection."

Then, as Edmée seemed about to move away, Madame Bastide added, quickly: "Pray don't suppose that I regret finding you here, mademoiselle."

You are the only person who inspires me with sufficient sympathy to make me feel willing to speak of my troubles. Solitude is pleasant to those who are suffering, but it does not cure them, whereas friendship heals their wounds."

"You never told me that you were unhappy, my dear madame," murmured the young girl, astonished at this preamble.

"Because I did not wish to pain you. Have you not your sorrows also? You have just been weeping, I see it very plainly."

"Why should I attempt to deny it?" rejoined Edmée, drying her eyes.

"Ah! well, let us confide our troubles to each other. Mine are of a nature that you can not have experienced, as you have never been married. Shall I tell you about them?"

"Yes; and if I can do aught to alleviate them—"

"There is nothing that can alleviate them. My life has been utterly wrecked, and I shall never regain the happiness I have lost; still if I had a true friend, I might sometimes forget what I have suffered. Do not be surprised at hearing me speak in this way to a comparative stranger. I distrusted you at first—I distrust everybody, I have so often been deceived—but I have now learned to know you, and now I have nothing to conceal from you. Oh! don't fear that I wish to force myself into your confidence," continued Madame Bastide, who had doubtless read alarm on Edmée's countenance; "I shall not ask you for your story, which can not be a long one, for you are not yet twenty; and, as regards your present situation, I only wish to know what you feel inclined to tell me."

This was said so frankly, and in a tone of such perfect sincerity, that Edmée instantly dismissed the suspicions to which the widow's earlier words had given rise.

"I told you a falsehood when I said that it was the inheritance of some property that called me to Paris—I am impelled to make this confession by another misfortune which has fallen upon me. Excessive misery is like excessive happiness, in one respect, at least: it makes one feel an irresistible longing for a confidante. I want you to know all, except, perhaps, my name."

"Then the name you bear is not your own?" inquired Edmée, timidly.

"It is my mother's name, but I took another when I married, though I ceased to bear it several years before I became a widow. You do not understand, I see. Well, let me explain matters. When I was about your age, I was comparatively wealthy, and I had a mother who adored me. I loved a young man who loved me in return, and whom I hoped to marry, though we did not belong to quite the same rank in life."

This being very similar to Edmée's own case, she began to listen with increased interest.

"We lived at Bordeaux. A gentleman arrived there, a former friend of my father, who had died in a foreign land. He was cordially welcomed by my mother, and he soon asked for my hand in marriage. I declined the offer. He declared that he would wait, and he did wait. Three months afterwards he had circulated slanderous reports about the man of my choice, and I was weak enough to believe his calumnies. A few months afterwards, he renewed his suit, and this time, yielding to my mother's entreaties, I married him. I soon discovered that his sole object was to obtain possession of my fortune. He succeeded in doing so, and two years afterwards—two years of martyrdom—I sued for a judicial separation and obtained it by abandoning to him all the property I had left me, and accept-

ing an allowance that barely sufficed for my maintenance. I never saw him again, but lived on broken-hearted until I heard of his death."

"That meant deliverance."

"Yes, and poverty as well. We had no children, thank God! and he bequeathed by will all the property he possessed to distant relatives, who refuse to continue paying me the allowance to which I am entitled. I should have to resort to an expensive law-suit to compel them to pay it, and I have nothing to live upon in the meantime. My husband was in the employ of the government when he died, and I hoped that the state would grant me a pension, or do something for my relief. I indeed came to Paris to petition the government to do so, but I have just learned that my request has been refused. There is nothing left for me now but to earn my own living. Tomorrow I shall leave Madame Gouverneur's, where the living is too dear for me, and start in search of employment. I can embroider very well, and I hope that this accomplishment will gain me a livelihood. All this would be nothing, however, if I could only forget the past, but regret for the happiness I have lost is killing me."

"Then you entertain no hope of a reconciliation with the young man you loved?"

"None whatever. Besides, he no longer cares for me. He thought that I was false to him, and he cursed me. He left Bordeaux after challenging my husband, who refused to fight with him, and I don't know what became of him. But forgive me, mademoiselle, for dwelling so long upon my misfortunes. I can see that I have saddened you, and you no doubt have enough to bear already. I hope, however, that this sorrowful confession will not alienate you from me."

"I should be heartless, indeed, if it did," rejoined Edmée, quickly. "Besides I am suffering too much myself not to sympathize with those who are in trouble."

"Then I did not make a mistake in opening my heart to you," replied Madame Bastide. "Let us be friends. Our friendship will alleviate our sorrows. I do not know yours, nor do I ask you to confide them to me; but if I can be of service to you in any way, pray don't hesitate to call upon me."

"Alas! madame," sighed Edmée, "I can do nothing for you, and you can do nothing for me, I fear!"

"Have you, also, been abandoned by the man you love?"

"No; but he has gone away, and I shall never see him again, perhaps."

"Why do you not join him? You seem to be sole mistress of your actions, as you are travelling alone."

"That is true. I am free; and I came here in the hope of finding him and my brother. But I do not know where to look for them. All I am aware of is that they are in Montmartre, and I was greatly delighted when you told me in the diligence that you intended to stop here. I fancied that Montmartre was a village, and that I should have no difficulty in finding them. I have just discovered my mistake. I have been searching for three hours, and no one can give me the address of the compatriot who has provided them with shelter."

"Shelter? Are they hiding, then?"

"Yes; though they have no cause to reproach themselves. They were accused of taking part in a revolt which followed upon the recent *coup d'état*. My brother was arrested; he succeeded in escaping, but he is still under a grave charge, so grave, indeed, that his life is in danger. The

man I love is less compromised, but he had linked his destiny to my brother's, and I made this journey to Paris in the hope of saving both of them."

"Saving them, how? Do you hope to secure a pardon for them?"

"No; I intend to go abroad with them. I told you that I expected to enter an English family as a governess. This was not true, and you must forgive me for having invented the falsehood. I did not know you then."

"I, also, began by concealing my real situation from you; and as I committed the same offence, it would ill become me to reproach you for not revealing your secret to a stranger. However—excuse me for questioning you—to reach a foreign land one must have money—"

"I have plenty of that, but passports are also necessary."

"And you see no way to procure them. Ah! well, I feel sure that the government will eventually depart from the rigorous measures it adopted immediately after the insurrection, and will soon relax its surveillance—"

"Never to the extent of permitting my brother's departure. We want to sail for America, and I believe that at Havre, passengers are obliged to prove their identity before embarking. Besides, descriptions of my brother have been circulated everywhere—and he has no papers that would enable him to pass himself off for another person."

"There is, perhaps, a way to save us all, for I don't care to remain in France, where I have neither relatives nor friends; and if you would allow me to go to America with you, I should be glad to do so. I have enough money left to pay my passage, and although the government has refused to help me, it certainly would not refuse me a passport, if it were only for the sake of escaping from my claims."

"That is probable," said Edmée, who did not exactly understand what Madame Bastide was aiming at.

"Ah! well," continued the young widow, "I might perhaps succeed in obtaining one for you, your brother, and your lover. I could invent some plausible story—pretend, for instance, that you were relatives of mine, and that we wished to leave France in order to settle in the United States."

"I scarcely think they would believe you."

"Who knows? My husband was a zealous Bonapartist, and was appointed to a high office shortly before the *coup d'état*. Certainly no one will suspect his widow of favouring the flight of the enemies of the government he served—nor will any one think it strange, under the circumstances, that I should wish to emigrate with my few remaining relatives. Will you allow me to try?"

"I should be infinitely obliged to you so far as I myself am concerned; but I cannot speak for the others, and before giving you a decided answer, I must consult my brother, and to consult him, I must find him."

"We will look for him together, then. I am familiar with Montmartre, and I will act as your guide; besides, being with me your questions will excite less remark than if you were alone. Have you made any inquiries of our landlady, Madame Gouverneur?"

"I did not dare to do so."

"I will; and it is possible that she may be able to give us the address of the friend who has sheltered your brother. She has lived in Montmartre for twenty years, and is thoroughly posted in regard to all that goes on here. Even if she is unable to furnish the information you want, she can make inquiries and among the people at the *table d'hôte* there will surely be



someone who has heard of your compatriot, providing, of course, that he is not a new-comer here. What is his name?"

"Lucien Doradour; and I think he has lived here several years. It is a long time since he left Périgord, and the persons I questioned before I left home had entirely lost sight of him, and were unable to give me his address; however, I am sure that he is still in Montmartre. My brother said as much in his letter, but unfortunately he distrusted the post, and did not give the exact address."

"He made a great mistake. The more time you are obliged to spend in searching for him, the greater the risk you will all run. But your brother must walk out sometimes, and you may perhaps meet him."

"That is what I hoped, but I have given up all idea of it now."

"And why? You only arrived here yesterday, and you went out for the first time to-day. You will be more fortunate to-morrow, perhaps."

"I fear that he doesn't dare to show himself out of doors. He knows that the police have a description of him."

"At all events, let us search for him together, and search until we find him; but this is not the place to do so. The sun is already setting as you can see, and we must not let the darkness overtake us in this lonely place. Indeed, I think we had better return to the boarding-house immediately."

"Very well, madame," replied Edmée, already unconsciously submitting to the stronger will of her new friend.

They leisurely made their way towards the boarding-house, the roof of which was plainly visible on the hill-side below them.

The path was not a smooth one by any means. After traversing the sterile tract on the summit of the height it followed a steep rocky descent, and the ladies stumbled frequently, especially Madame Bastide, who was much less accustomed to rough paths than Mademoiselle Chancelade, who had served her apprenticeship amid the hills of Périgord. There came a moment, indeed, when the young widow, after making a mis-step, and nearly losing her balance, found herself dashing down a very steep incline, in spite of all her efforts to check her progress, and the next instant she fell into the arms of a young man who was approaching from the opposite direction. The shock nearly brought them both to the ground, but fortunately the stranger had had time to plant himself firmly upon his feet, and, passing one arm about Madame Bastide's waist, he helped her to steady herself, saying: "Compose yourself, madame. Even if you are pursued, you need have no fears. I will protect you."

At the same time he politely removed from his mouth the pipe which he had been smoking, and awaited her response.

Madame Bastide, glancing up, beheld a tall, well-built, young man, with regular features, magnificent eyes, and a very pleasing expression of countenance. Her preserver, if preserver he might be called, impressed her favourably at the very first glance, and she faltered out a few words of thanks which would have been better chosen had she been less surprised. And really she had good cause for astonishment to find herself thus unceremoniously brought into contact with a well-dressed young man, who had the manners and used the language of a gentleman, for this lonely spot was, as a rule, only frequented by vagabonds of the worst kind.

"Shall I escort you out of this wilderness?" the stranger finally inquired.

"I thank you, sir," replied the young widow, "but I am not alone. I

came here with a friend. I left her behind, in spite of myself ; but here she comes."

Edmée was, in fact, hastily approaching, but she stopped short on seeing Madame Bastide in conversation with a gentleman. "Let us go to meet your friend," suggested the stranger to the young widow. "I think it would be well for me to explain what just occurred ; otherwise she might feel some alarm."

As he spoke he bared his head, and advanced towards Mademoiselle Chancelade, with his hat in his hand. Two exclamations of surprise resounded at the same time : "Louis ! Edmée !"

The brother and sister rushed into each other's arms, quite forgetting Madame Bastide, who stood watching the scene of recognition. It was not difficult for her to divine that the so-called Mademoiselle Védrières had miraculously found the brother whose absence she was deploring ; and she drew a little further back for fear of intruding upon their happiness. She even felt it her duty to turn her back upon them, and wait until they had finished kissing and exchanging caresses and confidential remarks. She was obliged to wait some time, for Louis Chancelade, whose precarious position had rendered him more prudent, made several inquiries concerning his sister's companion ; and Edmée had to tell him how she had made the lady's acquaintance, and how she hoped to provide them with the means of leaving France in her company. This rather strange account ought to have aroused Chancelade's distrust, but he accepted it without the slightest objection, and without expressing any doubt as to the sincerity of a person whom his sister knew so very slightly.

Chancelade was a man of impulse, and Madame Bastide had already inspired him with a great deal of interest. Coralie Bernache, who was younger and better looking than this widow, pleased him much less, and seemed to him a much less trustworthy person, though she had already given conclusive proofs of her devotion. He was indebted to her for his escape from prison and from Marteau at the Opera House, and he owed absolutely nothing to Madame Bastide ; however, the heart can give no reason for its preferences. But this was not a suitable time for him to explain his feelings to his sister, or even to give her a detailed account of his adventures since their separation. "Jacques is very well, and only thinks of you. You will see him to-morrow," he said to Edmée. "Now, come and introduce me to your new friend."

Edmée gladly assented ; and after the introduction had been made in due form, Louis cordially offered his hand to Madame Bastide, and said : "My sister has just told me that you, also, desire to leave France, as you are unhappy here. It will be no fault of mine if we do not leave together. Permit me, however, to add that it is not necessary for you to compromise yourself by endeavouring to obtain passports for us. I have a means of obtaining them which I cannot explain, even to my sister. We shall be obliged to wait a week, possibly longer," he continued, "and I don't think it will be advisable to make any change in our present arrangements. My sister and I could not live together without incurring great danger, but we can meet each other here at hours when the spot is little frequented. If Edmée discovers that she is watched, she can cease coming, and as you, madame, have no reason to fear the police, you will, perhaps, kindly consent to bring me news of her."

"I will gladly do so," was the prompt response.

"I must know where you are living, though," said Edmée. "I have

been looking for Doradour's house all day, but without managing to find it. The person to whom you told me to apply for information could not give me any."

"The house stands at the end of a sort of lane which bears no name," answered Louis. "You can see it from here—that pointed roof, covered with red tiles—"

"But how do you reach it?"

"You must walk down the boulevard, skirting the city wall; and opposite the city gate you will see a narrow lane. Doradour lives at the end of it, in a little house with a yard enclosed by iron railings. But don't go there unless it is absolutely necessary for you to see me. It will be much safer for you to meet me here every day, just above the spot where we are now standing. When there is anything to prevent me from coming, I will send Jacques. In fact he is so anxious to see you, that I will send him at noon to-morrow. He will be greatly pleased this evening, when I tell him of what has occurred. Now I must also know where you are living."

"You can see the house from here—that large white building. It is in the Rue des Abbesses."

"Ah, yes, I see; but I shall not risk calling there, unless I am compelled to do so by some unforeseen event. And now we must part. To-morrow Jacques will tell you why."

"Won't you accompany him?"

"I cannot say now. In any case, you will find someone here, and if I don't come to-morrow, I will see you on the following day. Kiss me, little sister, and don't grieve. Something tells me that our misfortunes are fast coming to an end—our misfortunes and yours, madame," added Louis, looking at Madame Bastide, who seemed to him more and more charming.

"I hope so, indeed, now that I have found two friends," she replied, with real emotion.

"Well, good bye," said Chancelade, hastening on up the steep path where the young widow had fallen into his arms.

Edmée, who had scarcely recovered from her first surprise, took her friend's arm, and they returned together to Madame Gouverneur's. They neither of them felt inclined to talk. Edmée was wondering what had taken her brother to the hill just as night was coming on, and Madame Bastide was thinking of the young man whose firm, frank language had awakened memories of other days. The man she had loved in former years had spoken like that, and she fancied that Chancelade resembled him.

The walk was not a long one, and they reached the house before they had exchanged a single word. Five o'clock was the dinner hour at this modest establishment, and when they reached the gate they heard the bell ringing to summon the boarders. Accordingly, the ladies merely had time for a very hasty toilet, and when they went down-stairs they found several persons already assembled in the dining-room. It was a large, but very plainly furnished apartment, the walls being covered with cheap paper and adorned with highly-coloured lithographs of a war-like character. The table was surrounded by cane-seated chairs, but that day, for a wonder, the table-cloth, which was usually only changed on Sundays, was of dazzling whiteness, and both a claret and a champagne-glass stood beside every plate. These unusual preparations denoted the expected presence of a guest of distinction, and another very significant fact was that Madame Gouverneur, instead of occupying the place reserved for her in the middle

of the table, was moving briskly about, scolding the maids, and occasionally disappearing to give certain instructions to the cook.

The landlady was a stout woman, who had once had considerable pretensions to good looks, and who was quite imposing in appearance even now. She treated her boarders with dignified familiarity, never allowing the political discussions to degenerate into quarrels, and of late she had often been obliged to assert her authority, for the boarders were not of the same opinion by any means. The majority, composed of retired officers, approved of the *coup d'état*, and did not hesitate to express a desire for the restoration of the empire; but there were also some private citizens, Liberals of 1830, and retired traders, who clung tenaciously to a republican form of government. Edmée and Madame Bastide had not dined at the public table on the evening before, as they had arrived too late, and consequently they were not acquainted with anyone. This being the case, they naturally kept a little apart from the others while waiting for the soup to be served, and they attracted very little attention, as most of the boarders were too old to notice a pretty woman.

However, Madame Gouverneur, busy as she was, found an opportunity to tell them that one of her boarders, Captain Ratibal, had invited an old military friend, a personage of distinction, to dine with him that evening, and that the repast would be of an exceptionally elegant character. The two friends would have been glad to dispense with this unusual display. They had no heart for gaiety, and so as to seclude themselves as much as possible, they seated themselves at the lower end of the table, as far as possible from the chairs which the landlady had reserved for the distinguished guest and his entertainer. The other boarders now also sat down. They were hungry and tired of waiting; besides, they thought that the landlady was taking too much upon herself to thus defer the dinner out of honour to a stranger.

Madame Gouverneur found herself obliged to yield to the wishes of her boarders, and reluctantly taking possession of her seat, she gave orders for the soup to be brought in. It promptly made its appearance, and some of the people had already finished partaking of it when Captain Ratibal entered, accompanied by a gentleman with a grey moustache. Madame Gouverneur bowed to them, and with a majestic gesture indicated the seats reserved for them directly opposite her own. They at once sat down, and devoted their attention to the soup, like the others. This unassuming behaviour did not prevent the boarders from staring at the stranger, and exchanging whispered comments on his appearance. He had a decidedly distinguished air, and wore the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour in the button-hole of his black frock-coat. This alone was quite enough to awe such petty citizens as were present, and to excite the curiosity of the retired officers. Some took the stranger for a general, but Madame Gouverneur, who had been enlightened in advance by Captain Ratibal, astonished everybody by saying in a loud voice: "Monsieur le Comte, will you do me the honour to take some more soup?"

"The soup is excellent, madame," replied the captain's guest, politely, "but with your permission I will keep myself in reserve for the boiled beef."

This friendly manner set everybody at ease, and the conversation soon became animated, still, the title of count had produced its effect, and everyone felt obliged to exercise a certain amount of reserve in his remarks. Edmée was so absorbed in her own thoughts that she scarcely noticed the entrance

of the distinguished guest, and she did not glance at him until she heard his voice. Then she certainly did raise her eyes, and lowered them almost instantly, for she had recognised the Comte de Sigoulès, and of all the acquaintances she could have met in Paris, he was, perhaps, the one she most dreaded to see, for he had well-nigh forbidden her to make the journey, and she felt almost guilty in his presence. Her first impulse, indeed, was to leave the room, but she reflected that this abrupt departure would certainly attract attention, and that it would be better for her to try to conceal herself as much as possible. The room was not very brilliantly lighted, and Edmée and Madame Bastide were sitting in the shadow, so it was not strange that M. de Sigoulès failed to notice the ladies, especially as they took no part in the general conversation.

"What is the matter with you, my dear Edmée?" whispered Madame Bastide to her friend.

"Me? Nothing," stammered the young girl.

"You turned pale on seeing that gentleman. Do you know him?"

"Yes, he is from my own neighbourhood, and I should prefer it if he did not see me here. I wish you would talk to me as much as possible, so that he will be less likely to notice me."

"I will do so, of course. You may think it strange, but it seems to me that this is not the first time I have seen him. Is he a native of Périgord?"

"Yes. He resides on his estates there."

"Still he must leave home sometimes, as he is here. I must have met him at Bordeaux. Will you think me too inquisitive if I ask you his name?"

"I don't mind telling you. He is named Monsieur de Sigoulès."

"And he owns a château near Salviac, does he not?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

"I met him at Bordeaux a long time ago," faltered Madame Bastide, becoming more and more agitated. "Hasn't he a near relative who will be his heir—a relative much younger than himself?"

"Yes, a cousin—the Baron de Mussidan."

"And is this cousin still living?" inquired the young widow eagerly.

"And do you know where he is?"

"Yes," replied Edmée, who could not understand her friend's curiosity.

"He was in prison until a short time ago, but Monsieur de Sigoulès succeeded in securing his release, and brought him to Paris, where he is now probably staying."

"In prison! Why?"

"For participating in an insurrection against the government, like my brother. They pardoned him, thanks to his uncle's influence, but showed no mercy to Louis, who would still be a prisoner had he not been fortunate enough to escape."

"But the insurrection occurred near Salviac, did it not? In that case your brother can't belong to Bergerac."

"No, madame; nor do I. When I told you so, I did not know you well enough to trust you implicitly, but now that you have seen my brother, I have nothing more to conceal from you. May I ask, now that you know all, why you take such an interest in Monsieur de Mussidan?"

Madame Bastide would, perhaps, have found it difficult to reply, but a timely diversion spared her the necessity. Captain Ratibal, who was anxious to entertain his old comrade brilliantly, had not waited for the

dessert to offer the company champagne. The corks had just been drawn, and Madame Gouverneur's maids were dashing round the table, filling the glasses. As soon as this was done, Captain Ratibal rose to his feet and proposed the count's health in the following flattering terms: "To my brave comrade, Sigoulès, who would to-day be a general of division, had he not thought it his duty to break his sword in 1830, and who has condescended to accept the modest invitation of a former member of the royal body-guard."

This toast was well received, though some of the people present approved of the revolution which had forced the count into retirement, and M. de Sigoulès returned thanks for the compliment in a few well-chosen words. Unfortunately, he did not stop there. Having taken the trouble to climb to Montmartre to accept the invitation of an old comrade whom he had met by chance, on the evening before, he was resolved to behave fittingly, and show the utmost politeness to the other persons at the *table-d'hôte*. They amused him exceedingly, and this little experience of social circles that he had never previously frequented, interested him as much as a voyage of discovery.

So he rose again as soon as the applause following upon his reply had subsided, and glass in hand, he said, in a clear, sonorous voice: "Now, gentlemen, I drink to the ladies!"

With the exception of Edmée and Madame Bastide, all the members of the fair sex arose, as with one accord, and Madame Gouverneur nearly fell over the table in her eagerness to clink glasses with the old nobleman. Edmée and her friend, taken unawares by this general invitation, hoped to escape notice by not rising from their seats. They were doomed to disappointment, however. The count was too well-bred to reproach them for not responding to his toast; but Madame Gouverneur, who spared no one, at once exclaimed:

"Ah! well, madame and mademoiselle, won't you condescend to drink with us?" And as the young widow expressed her willingness by a sign, she continued in a still louder tone: "I hope you will not offer Monsieur le Comte such an affront as to remain seated."

Edmée longed to sink through the floor, and Madame Bastide also was greatly embarrassed by the turn affairs had taken. The old nobleman, whom the scene amused, thought he was doing the right thing in rejoining: "It isn't for the ladies to disturb themselves. I will present my request in person, and I flatter myself that they won't refuse me." Thereupon, with an agility that would have done honour to a young man, he pushed back his chair, and darted to the further end of the table in search of the two delinquents.

Madame Bastide rose to await his coming, screening Edmée who sat next to her. The count addressed the young widow courteously, paid her a well-turned compliment, and then chinked glasses with her. He did not seem to recognise her although she was looking at him with all her eyes. Then came Edmée's turn. Seeing there was no help for it, she had summoned up all her courage, and now stood awaiting the ordeal, having prepared a short sentence which she now spoke in an undertone so that it might be heard by M. de Sigoulès alone: "Pray, do not call me by name. After dinner I will explain everything."

The old nobleman, during his eventful career, had met with many surprises, but nothing had ever equalled the astonishment he felt when he suddenly recognised Edmée. However, he did not speak the name which

she entreated him to keep secret ; in fact, he did not say a single word, but he forgot to drink, and it was she who clinked her glass against his own.

He quickly recovered himself, however, and after apologising for his insistence, he returned to his seat amid the applause of the witnesses of this little scene. He now longed for the dinner to come to a close, so that he might have an interview with Edmée, and question her about her position, and her plans. He was not so much offended with her for having left Salviac without his permission, and he was ready and willing to serve her, even now. Madame Bastide interested him much less. He thought her pretty, but he did not remember having ever seen her before, and he instinctively distrusted her.

"I thank you very much for having invited me, my dear fellow," he remarked to his friend Ratibal. "One is very well treated here, and there are certainly some charming ladies."

"It is only by the merest chance, however," replied the old trooper, lowering his voice. "Most of the lady-boarders are between fifty and eighty. Those you just spoke to are new-comers, who arrived last night. Still this isn't the first time I have seen the one in mourning. She came here two or three years ago, but I never saw the younger one before. I understand that she is a governess who has come to Paris to find a situation."

The count could have informed his friend upon this point, but he merely replied : "She doesn't look like a governess. Teachers are almost always withered unattractive women, whereas this one is plump and has a charming face."

"You are as susceptible as of yore, I see."

"Not quite ; but I still like to see a pretty woman, and I have a decided weakness for talking to young girls. They don't distrust me. Seeing my grey hairs, they tell me all about their love-affairs, and I give them good advice, which they seldom, if ever, follow."

"You gave them very bad advice in years gone by, if I remember rightly. 'When the devil grew old, the devil a saint would be.' Why don't you frankly admit that you would like to have a chat with that young girl who casts down her eyes and blushes whenever anyone pays her a compliment? Every man to his taste. I prefer the other one—the one in mourning. But never mind, I will arrange matters."

This little aside between the two companions-in-arms had been drowned by the clamour of a political discussion between a retired lieutenant and a retired shop-keeper. Ratibal now put an end to it by calling out to Madame Gouverneur across the table: "Do you intend to have coffee served here, madame?"

"You know that is the custom of the house, my dear captain," replied the landlady with a languishing look, for she still pined for conquests.

"Yes ; but for once in a way you might reserve your little parlour for my friend and myself, and a few of your boarders."

As he spoke, he cast a glance at Edmée and Madame Bastide ; and Madame Gouverneur, who was quick witted, made him a sign that she understood. A moment afterwards she rose to give the necessary orders, but the other people, excited by the champagne which continued to flow freely, scarcely noticed her absence. The conversation began afresh, and everybody took part in it excepting Edmée and her new acquaintance, who were only waiting for an opportunity to withdraw. This opportunity presented itself at the dessert when two or three gentlemen requested permission to smoke.

This was acceded by a majority of the ladies present, a few old maids even declaring that the scent of tobacco was agreeable to them ; but Edmée and Madame Bastide immediately retired. M. de Sigoulès dared not follow them, not having a plausible excuse at hand. However his companion undertook to furnish him with one. "You know there is a garden connected with the establishment," he remarked, in a loud voice. "Suppose we take a turn there, while waiting for our coffee. The atmosphere is stifling here, and I am sure you would enjoy a breath of fresh air."

"That's true," replied Sigoulès. "Young men didn't smoke in our time. I have since learned to do so in order not to make myself conspicuous, still I only care to smoke in the open air."

After these remarks, intended to explain their departure, they quietly withdrew, leaving the other people to continue their discussion.

In the hall they met Madame Gouverneur, who graciously remarked : "Coffee will be served in the parlour, gentlemen, and I hope that my new boarders will decide to keep you company. I invited them on your behalf."

"Are they waiting for us?" inquired Ratibal with a malicious smile.

"No," replied the landlady. "They went up to their rooms, but they will soon be down again. I must return to the table, however. Some of the gentlemen have taken a little too much wine, and if I am not there to hold them in check, they will take sieze another by the hair, I fear."

"My dear Sigoulès," remarked Ratibal, when the landlady had passed on, "I must warn you that it is never very warm in the parlour. Do you feel inclined to wait there until it pleases the ladies to join us? I must confess that at my age I don't find the prospect particularly inviting."

"You don't understand the situation," replied the count, quickly. "I must tell you that the younger of the two ladies is from my neighbourhood, and I am very anxious to have a conversation with her. She is the daughter of one of my tenants, and there are matters of importance upon which I particularly wish to speak to her."

"Oh ! indeed ! Well I will leave you, and if you don't return to the table, I will explain your absence. You see the door there?—that's the parlour."

The count allowed his old friend to turn away, and directed his steps towards the door which Ratibal had just pointed out to him. Halfway along the hall, however, he found Edmée standing at the foot of the stairs. "I waited for you here," she remarked. "I felt sure you would come after me and—"

"My dear child," interrupted M. de Sigoulès, "I really ought to scold you, but I haven't the heart to do so. I would much rather help you out of the scrape into which you have got yourself, in spite of everything I said to you at Salviae. This is no place for a private conversation, and I want you to come and see me to-morrow at the Hôtel du Helder. I shall be there all day. In the meantime, will you have the kindness to briefly answer one or two questions. Your brother is in Paris, and you have seen him, I suppose?"

"I met him this afternoon for the first time. He is living near here, at the house of a friend, and Jacques is with him."

"Jacques ! That's too bad ! You must all have lost your senses. The police are on the look-out, and if I don't interfere, they will soon be arrested. Now, who is that lady who sat by you at the table, and who came with you to Paris, it seems?"

"I met her at Bordeaux, and we travelled together. She used to be ac-



quainted with your cousin, Monsieur de Mussidan, it seems," said Edmée.

"Hum ! that's not a very good recommendation. What is her name ?"

"She calls herself Madame Bastide. She is a widow, and I have perfect confidence in her."

"Well, I will ask Adhémar for some information about her. In the meantime, I should advise you not to divulge your secrets to this person who pretends she is a friend of my scapegrace of a cousin. In these times spies are to be met with in all directions."

Edmée was about to expostulate, but M. de Sigoulès abruptly continued: "That is all I want to ask you this evening. This is no place for you. You had much better return to your own room. I will go back to the table and take my coffee there with the other people. So, now good-bye for the present."

## IX.

PIERRE MARTEAU possessed some of the attributes which are essential to a good detective ; among them being industry, courage, and perseverance. But he lacked many other equally necessary qualities, especially tact, and quickness of discernment. Moreover, he was not sufficiently acquainted with Paris and Parisian life to achieve immediate success in his new profession. However, thanks to General de Plancoët, he had been appointed inspector in the political brigade, with duties which were not very clearly defined. The search for Louis Chancelade had been entrusted to him as a beginning, probably because he was better acquainted with the fugitive than any of the other officers—having had the culprit in his custody at Salviac. Besides this special mission suited him the better, as he hated his former prisoner. Chancelade's escape had been the cause of his dismissal, and he had not yet succeeded in discovering how this escape had been accomplished. He suspected that it had been favoured by someone in the prison, but by whom ? He had at first suspected his wife's pretended cousin, and had ended by suspecting his wife herself. The pair had separated after a violent scene on their arrival in Paris, Aurélie having declared that she could not endure life with him any longer. The general had then advised Pierre to let her have her own way, and as he could not refuse to follow the advice of his powerful protector, it was decided that Aurélie should utilise her vocal talents by giving lessons in singing.

While Madame Marteau installed herself in a handsome suite of apartments in the Rue de l'Arcade, her husband contented himself with a modest room in the house they had formerly occupied in the Rue Saint Louis en l'Île, not far from the prefecture of police ; and, although he did not associate much with the other inspectors, he went every day to report, but merely for form's sake, for his superiors, knowing that he was effectually protected, and that he had been charged with a special mission, allowed him to do much as he pleased. His first attempts to find Chancelade were not attended with much success. He lacked experience, and did not know how to secure reliable information promptly. However, his wife, in one of their quarrels, had confessed that the pretended Marie Minotte was not a relative of hers, but an actress, named Coralie Bernache, who had abandoned the stage, and who resided in Paris, in the Rue Mogador. This was important news for Marteau, who had also procured Vignory's address at the Hôtel de Bade, on the Boulevard des Italiens. There was not much

to be done as regards the ex-sub-prefect ; but Marteau constantly mounted guard in the Rue Mogador, in the hope that Chancelade would come there. It thus happened that late one afternoon he saw Coralie's maid, with whom he had already tried to start an acquaintance, entering the house where her mistress lived, carrying a new domino, and a large bunch of pink heather. From this he concluded that Coralie meant to attend the great masquerade ball at the Opera House that evening, and his wife having divulged the fact that the whilom actress had been smitten with Chancelade's good looks, it occurred to him that she had perhaps made an appointment there with the fugitive from Salviac prison. This conclusion was really a very hazardous one, but it did honour to Pierre Marteau's sagacity, and he lost no time in acting upon it. No one else had paid much attention to the Chancelade case. The new government had something else to attend to, and, besides, the authorities were the less anxious to capture M. Santelli's murderer, as the commissary, by his excessive severity, had done more harm than good to the cause he served. Indeed, it was due to this comparative indifference that Chancelade had not yet been recaptured, for if the veteran detectives had been set upon his track, he could not have escaped them.

However, in the person of the ex-warder, Louis had a very dangerous enemy, for Marteau had a personal interest in securing his arrest. The ex-jailer repaired to the Opera House that night, as soon as the doors were opened, and fruitlessly walked about for a long time in a hired domino, which greatly hampered his movements. He did have the consolation of seeing the Count de Sigoulès and Adhémar de Mussidan pass by ; but the latter having been regularly pardoned, was now secure, and although Marteau followed him for a few moments, it was only to overhear what he was saying. He presently saw him and Sigoulès enter a box occupied by General de Plancoët and a lady whom he did not recognise ; but soon afterwards he met Coralie Bernache, recognised her voice, and afterwards dogged her steps persistently. When he saw her accost a gentleman in a domino, who wore a sprig of heather similar to the one pinned upon her own breast, and whose height and bearing corresponded with that of Edmée's brother, he felt sure that he had at last found his man, and he would have arrested him then and there, had he dared ; but he had been instructed to avoid any open scandal. It was then that the idea of following the suspicious couple occurred to him. He thought that Chancelade would escort Coralie home, and that he might follow them in another vehicle ; but he reckoned without his host, as we have seen. Thanks to Jacques' interference, he lost his clue, for he discovered the next day that the pretended detective had made a fool of him. No officer named Truffier was known at the prefecture, and the driver of cab No. 954, when found, declared and proved that he had not plied for hire that night in the neighbourhood of the Opera House.

Marteau wasted the following day in fruitless inquiries. He had only one extra feeble chance, that of meeting the pretended detective, whose falsehoods had so misled him. This man must be an accomplice of Chancelade's, and if Marteau could succeed in laying hands upon him, he might compel him to speak. Marteau had also satisfied himself that Coralie Bernache was really in communication with Chancelade, and that he must turn his attention to her, if he wished to arrest his man. However, her adventure at the ball would surely put her on her guard, and she would hardly be so imprudent as to meet Louis again, now that she knew she was watched.

Still Marteau said to himself that there might be a way of arranging matters with her ; knowing her but slightly, he thought her quite capable of delivering up the fugitive for a sum of money, and so great was his animosity against the man, whose escape had cost him his berth, that he would have cheerfully paid this sum out of his own pocket. Moreover, Marteau had several questions to ask the spurious Marie Minotte. They had not spoken together since the escape, for she had decamped without warning him, and he now tried to devise some pretext for paying her a visit, feeling sure that she had not recognised him in his domino at the ball, and that she had no idea that he was now connected with the police. He knew, by experience, that she was thoughtless and garrulous, and he felt satisfied that a shrewd man would have little or no trouble in drawing her out. Accordingly, on the second day after the ball, Marteau decided to make the venture, and wended his way to Coralie's abode, wondering if she would consent to see him, and if it would not be advisable for him to give her servant an assumed name.

An unforeseen incident settled his doubts. Just as he turned round the corner of the Rue Mogador, he found himself literally face to face with Coralie. There was no way to pass her unseen ; it was necessary either to stop and enter into conversation, or else to take flight. That being the case, the ex-jailer decided to stand his ground, and he lifted his hat just as Coralie cried, laughing : " Why, is it you ? Good day, cousin. How have you been getting on since I saw you at Salviac ? "

" Badly, very badly," growled Marteau.

" Yes ; I know that they dismissed you, but you have no reason to be angry with me. It was Vignory who caused all your misfortunes. Not that he has gained much by it. They turned him out as well, so I heard."

" He deserved it. He played an outrageous trick upon me, and if I ever meet him again, I shall certainly tell him what I think of him. I'll show him that an old soldier won't allow himself to be gulled by a young popinjay like he is."

" Oh ! if I were in your place, I should let him alone. He deserves a lesson, but it isn't worth your while to give it to him. Do as I do. I don't trouble myself any more about the simpleton than if I had never known him."

" Then you have not seen him since his return to Paris ? "

" I saw him at a distance, the other night, at the masquerade ball at the Opera House, but I assure you I felt no inclination to speak to him. He was as drunk as he could be."

This remark put Marteau at his ease. As Coralie admitted that she had attended the ball, she had evidently not recognised him in the disguise which he had assumed for the purpose of spying upon her. " But never mind Vignory," she added gaily. " Tell me how my cousin Aurélie is ? "

" Your cousin ? " repeated the ex-jailer. " You know very well that you are no relative of hers."

" We were fast friends in our youth, and that is better than being relatives. I was very intimate with her when she was Mademoiselle de Saint-Amour, and in those days she had very little idea of marrying you."

" It would have been a precious good thing if I had never had any idea of it myself," growled Marteau, in reply.

" And why, my friend ? Aurélie is a charming woman. She brought you a handsome dowry, and the general's protection into the bargain. I have heard that you owed your position as chief-warder to her. It is true

that you have lost it, although it suited you perfectly, but the Marquis de Plancoët will soon find you a better one."

Pierre plainly realised that Coralie was making fun of him; but although his heart swelled with rage, he took good care not to reveal it, for she would go off without any ceremony, in which case he would have to say good-bye to all the information he hoped to extort from her. "What are you doing now?" continued Coralie, who took infinite pleasure in tormenting Chancelade's persecutor.

"Nothing; and time hangs so heavily on my hands that I am glad to meet you and have a talk with you."

"You are very complimentary, I am sure."

"I am not much of a hand at compliments, but I assure you that I am really very glad to see you. In fact, I should have called on you if I had known where you lived."

"You wouldn't have had much trouble in ascertaining my address; I am tolerably well known in Paris. But as we have met here, you had better accompany me. I am going to do a little shopping. Come with me, and we can chat on the way."

Pierre hesitated. The proposal did not exactly please him; still this seemed to be an excellent opportunity to obtain the information he coveted. He was even surprised that Coralie should treat him so cordially, and the opportunity she offered him confirmed him in the opinion that she did not distrust him. "Oh! I understand!" she now continued. "You are afraid of compromising yourself by acting as my escort. That is only natural, as you are a married man. Very well, we will say no more about it. I must go. Remember me to Aurélie."

"No, no," replied Marteau, quickly. "Nothing could afford me greater pleasure. In what direction are you going?"

"To the Boulevards. But you are not obliged to give me your arm. You can walk along beside me, and leave me whenever you have had enough of my society." The ex-jailer bowed his acquiescence, but Coralie did not give him time to speak. "Well, now that we are friends again," she continued, "I hope that you will tell me all about your wife. We did not get on very well at Salviac, and really she was not very kind to me just before my departure; still I bear her no malice, and if ever she has any need of me, I shall be delighted to be of service to her."

"She has no need of any one," replied the ex-jailer, sulkily.

"I understand. Your protection is sufficient for her. I am extremely pleased to learn that you are getting on so well together."

"We are not living together now," grunted Marteau.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Coralie, with affected astonishment.

"It became impossible after my dismissal from office. I am now in search of some employment, and Aurélie has opened a singing-school for young ladies."

"An excellent idea, certainly! She could hardly do better than devote herself to the education of young girls. But, why don't you confess that there has been a quarrel, and that you are not yet reconciled?"

"I am certainly very angry with Aurélie for having had a hand in the shameful trick which that sub-prefect played upon me. I did not blame you so much, for you had thoughtlessly got Vignory into a scrape, and were trying to get him out of it; but my wife ought to have refused point-blank to have anything to do with the scheme, for she knew very well the danger to which she exposed me."

"I don't deny it, and yet no harm would have been done if that fellow Chancelade had not succeeded in making his escape."

"Speaking of that man's escape, no one has ever been able to find out how it was managed; but you know, I suppose?"

"I? You must certainly be dreaming. I did not have charge of your prisoners, nor did I feel the slightest interest in them."

"Aurélié told me a very different story."

"Indeed! what did she say?"

"Well, there is no reason why I should conceal it from you. She pretends that you fell in love with Chancelade—"

"And what if I did? That was no business of hers."

"She added that you took advantage of your sojourn in the prison to open Chancelade's cell for him, and also one of the windows in our rooms."

Aurélié had really said nothing of the kind to her husband; Marteau merely stated what he himself believed to be a falsehood in order to arrive at the truth, and his ruse proved successful.

"She dared to invent such a falsehood as that!" exclaimed Coralie, who at once became furiously angry. "Ah! well, I'll teach her to meddle with my affairs! I will tell you the truth—I will. So much the worse for you if it grieves you. It was your wife who opened the doors and windows for the prisoner who asked her to do so. She couldn't refuse him anything."

"That's absurd. She didn't even know Chancelade by sight, and he only spent one day in the prison."

"Who said anything about Chancelade? I did take a fancy to that fellow, but I did not even think of such a thing as setting him free; besides, I could not have managed it had I even wanted to, for I didn't know where his cell was. I was referring to the Baron de Mussidan, my friend."

"I—I—I do not understand you," stammered Marteau, turning pale.

"Well, he had been in prison for two months, and your wife had had plenty of time to make his acquaintance."

"What do you mean?"

"You certainly must have a hard head. Still, I don't see why I should be silent as Aurélié has accused me falsely. You must have been as blind as a bat not to have seen what was going on. Your wife fell desperately in love with the baron, and used to visit him frequently in his cell."

"That's false! If it were true, Mussidan would have escaped, not Chancelade. Besides I don't believe what you say about my wife's goings on."

"Don't believe me, eh? All right; but Aurélié didn't care for Mussidan to escape, for she felt sure that he would be pardoned, and she wished to enjoy his society as long as possible. He could have escaped, however, had he wished to do so; but he refused, and almost forced your wife to release Chancelade. It may surprise you, but such was really the case. I myself was present."

"You might have prevented the escape," muttered Marteau gloomily.

"By warning you? Not I! I stand by my friends, I do; at least, until they betray me. Besides I wasn't sorry to see a handsome young fellow like Chancelade get out of his scrape, especially as Monsieur de Mussidan was by no means anxious to go off. He might have done so a dozen times had he liked, for he left the prison at night-time whenever he chose."

"What do you say?" exclaimed Pierre, in the utmost consternation.

"The truth, my friend," replied Coralie. "Monsieur de Mussidan had business to attend to in the town, or the neighbourhood—I don't know which—and your wife, who was anxious to please him, allowed him to go out at

night, on condition that he would return before daybreak, and I must do the baron the justice to say that he always kept his word."

"But how did he manage to do it? The prison-gate was always closely guarded."

"Yes; but the windows of your apartments were not. Aurélie procured a rope-ladder for him, and he could get in as easily as he got out."

"This is incredible!" murmured the victimised husband.

"Chancelade made use of the window also, but he wasn't foolish enough to return and constitute himself a prisoner again. He was charged with having murdered the commissary, and his head was by no means safe on his shoulders, whereas Monsieur de Mussidan merely had imprisonment to fear; so as soon as he learned that the son of his cousin's tenant was in danger of death, he exerted his influence over Aurélie to induce her to let the young man escape."

"He may have had reasons which you little suspect for acting so generously," muttered Pierre. "Perhaps it was he who killed Monsieur Santelli."

"What an idea!" exclaimed Coralie, in profound astonishment.

"Well, it is an idea that would occur to almost any one acquainted with the facts. Monsieur de Mussidan often left the prison at night time, you say. Suppose he went out on the night when the fatal shot was fired. The prison isn't far from the club-house where the commissary was killed."

"You forget that Mussidan had no gun in his cell, and that he couldn't have stolen or borrowed one."

"A couple of days before my departure from Salviac, they found an English gun concealed in the grounds of the club-house."

"That's strange, but I can't believe that the baron was guilty of such a crime. He had no personal reason to hate the commissary, and people of his rank don't stoop to commit murder. And, besides," added Coralie, shrewdly, "when a man has a crime like that on his conscience, he is worried by remorse, whereas Adhémar is leading a gay life here. He was at the masquerade ball with old Sigoulès. I saw him there, and he seemed to be enjoying himself immensely."

"That proves nothing."

"Well, what if I told you that Sigoulès introduced him to General de Plancoët, your friend, who was there, in a private box, with a lady. It is true that the general received him rather coldly, but the lady favoured him with a very cordial welcome."

Marteau gave Coralie a searching look, and instantly divined her meaning. "Go on," he said coldly. "The lady in question was my wife, I suppose."

"I think so, or, rather, I am sure of it, for I followed the count and the baron after they left the box, and overheard a part of their conversation. I might even tell you, to console you, that the baron does not seem inclined to renew his intrigue with Aurélie."

"So much the worse!" exclaimed Marteau.

"So much the worse!" repeated Coralie, in amazement. "Then I suppose that the more adorers your wife has, the better pleased you are."

"She has gone so far now that I don't bother myself about what she does. But I am her husband, and if I found that baron and her together, it would afford me infinite pleasure to kill him, as I should have a right to do, even in the eyes of the law."

"Ah! ah! that is not a bad idea, but I don't believe that you will have

that satisfaction. Aurélie is as prudent as a serpent, and she won't run the risk of asking Monsieur de Mussidan to your rooms. If I were in your place, I should devise a different mode of revenge. I should try to prove that this nobleman had the murder of the commissary upon his conscience, as you just said, and the authorities would have him guillotined."

Marteau started. Coralie had guessed what was passing in his mind, but he did not care to admit it. "Arresting criminals is none of my business," he retorted quickly, "and I am glad of it, for I should probably be no more successful at that game than at guarding them. I have had enough of serving a government which dismisses a faithful servant instead of rewarding him, and even if I happened to meet Chancelade this very day I assure you, upon my word of honour, that I should not even call a policeman to arrest him."

"You old scoundrel!" thought Coralie. "You consider yourself very shrewd, but I am shrewder than you are, and I am going to have a little fun at your expense." And thereupon she said aloud: "I can very readily understand your disgust, and to prove that I bear you no ill-will, I promise you that I will try to procure you a better situation. I haven't as much influence as the general, of course, but I have a friend who might be of service to you. Would you object to a situation abroad—in Russia for instance?"

"No, certainly not," promptly replied the ex-jailer, though nothing on earth would have induced him to leave France until he had avenged himself upon his two Salviac prisoners.

"Then I will see what I can do for you. A particular friend of mine, Prince Lounine, has immense estates near Moscow, and I will ask him to give you a position as manager or steward."

"His offer wouldn't be refused, I assure you."

"He has just returned to Paris very unexpectedly, just as he always does—and do you know, I received an anonymous letter giving me an appointment at the Opera House ball, the other night. Well, it was the prince who wrote it, disguising his handwriting; but I recognised it and went to the ball, and had a scene with him. I pretended I was jealous to prevent him from scolding me for making appointments with people I didn't know. But the strangest thing of it all was that we were followed about during the whole time we were there."

"Impossible!" said Marteau feeling ill at ease.

"Yes, we were; a tall, masked man, wearing a domino, followed us all over the Opera House, though we could not imagine why. He did not leave us until we reached the outer door, and I believe he would have followed us even further, if we had not taken a cab. But we finally succeeded in getting rid of him, and finished the evening very pleasantly with a supper at the Café Anglais. Now, would you believe it? I fancied I was being watched on account of what occurred at Salviac. The police are so stupid that they may think I am on intimate terms with that fellow Chancelade! If so, they are very much mistaken. He's a handsome fellow, but I don't fancy rustics, and I have no intention of ruining my prospects for the sake of a poor country schoolmaster. Besides, search as much as they please, they won't find him. For while I was at the ball, I heard the old count tell Monsieur de Mussidan that Chancelade had arrived at New York, and that his sister was going to join him there. But I don't know why I talk so much about matters that don't interest you," said Coralie, suddenly checking herself. "Here we are on the boulevard, and I have to go to that jeweller's over there, so I will excuse you from dancing attendance on me

any longer, especially as I don't suppose you intend to offer me a bracelet. We part good friends, do we not?"

"Won't you allow me to call and see you sometimes?"

"Yes, certainly, whenever you like. You know my address."

"No," replied Marteau, unblushingly.

"I live at No. 19 Rue Mogador. Ask for Madame Bernache. You will always find me at home in the afternoon, and at the first opportunity I will introduce you to the prince."

"You are very kind; but one question more, I beg."

"Go on."

"Do you know where Monsieur de Mussidan is staying?"

"I presume that he is staying at the same hotel as his relative, Monsieur de Sigoulès. But as for telling you what hotel it is, I don't know; still I will make inquiries, if you like."

"You would do me a great favour."

"I have a friend who is well acquainted with Mussidan; her name is Clara Lasourcee, and I can probably obtain the information from her. But once more let me advise you not to create a scandal. You would gain nothing by it."

With this sage remark, Coralie offered the tips of her fingers to the ex-chief-warder, tripped lightly across the street, and directed her steps towards the Madeleine. She was delighted with the result of her interview with Aurélie's husband, for she flattered herself that she had thrown him entirely off Chancelade's track, and congratulated herself upon her diplomatic talent. "You can call on me, if you like, you scamp," she muttered to herself; "but you won't find Louis there, and if you trouble Mussidan, he will teach you a lesson."

Pierre Marteau was reflecting, as he strolled down the boulevard in the opposite direction to that which Coralie had taken. He was a singular character. He knew very well in what position his wife stood as regards General de Plancoët, and yet, he still cared for her. Indeed, although he had consented to the separation she had insisted upon after their return from Salviae, he had not renounced her, and fully expected to live with her again as soon as circumstances would permit, that is to say when she had made some money. This course seemed quite natural to him. However, apart from the question of the general, he was extremely jealous of Aurélie; and Coralie had greatly enraged him by telling him how M. de Mussidan had been mixed up in Louis Chancelade's mysterious escape. He now recollected certain incidents to which he had not paid attention at Salviae, incidents which proved that his wife and his prisoner Mussidan had deceived him shamefully for two months, under his very eyes. This was enough, and more than enough, to change the dislike he had always felt for the bantering baron into positive hatred—one of those fierce hatreds that never die out. He had known the truth but five minutes, and yet he had already condemned Adhémar de Mussidan to death. And besides, the more he reflected, the more convinced he became that Mussidan was the murderer of the commissary-general.

The authorities had not even thought of absolving him, for it had seemed utterly impossible that he could be the culprit—the mere fact of his being in prison constituting a conclusive *alibi*. But if it were established that the baron had left the prison that night, this apparent *alibi* would amount to nothing. It was necessary to establish this, however; and to do so a confession must be extorted from Aurélie, who had allowed the baron to



leave the prison. This was a difficult, but by no means impossible, task ; for if the baron should now turn a deaf ear to Aurélie's protestations of affection, as Coralie predicted, she would never forgive him for his disdain.

Marteau bitterly regretted that he had not discovered the truth before leaving Salviac. Had he known it, with what delight he would have transferred his animosity from Chancelade to Mussidan ! What zeal he would have displayed in searching for the owner of the English rifles so providentially found in the garden of the club-house. And he would have succeeded, at least so he flattered himself. Undoubtedly there was still time to institute a search, but in Paris the investigation presented well-nigh insurmountable difficulties. No matter ! Marteau was firmly resolved to start on the inquiry and to pursue it vigorously ; for he now hated Mussidan a hundred times more intensely than he had ever hated Chancelade. Chancelade had never derided him and deceived him ; he was not his personal enemy, nor would he have attempted to escape, had not Mussidan compelled Aurélie to facilitate his flight. The zeal, too, that the baron had displayed in insuring the escape of a man whom he scarcely knew, went very much against him. Mussidan, who, like all men of his stamp, prided himself upon his generosity, had not been able to endure the thought that an innocent man should be charged with a crime which he himself had committed. He had not carried his generosity so far as to acknowledge that he was the real culprit, but he had remained in prison letting the innocent man escape in his stead. He had remained, too, possibly because if he had taken advantage of the opportunity for flight, the officials would have discovered that this was not the first time he had profited by Aurélie's kindness, and would thus have suspected him of murdering the commissary.

Thus, the murderer, the cowardly murderer whom the public could not excuse as it had excused the December insurgents, was Adhémar de Mussidan, the handsome Adhémar, the courtly nobleman, who fascinated all the women by posing as a hero of romance.

It was thus that Marteau reasoned, and he trembled with delight at the thought of his revenge. Still an idea that suddenly presented itself marred his satisfaction. He asked himself if he might not seriously compromise Madame Marteau by denouncing M. de Mussidan, and if the authorities would not believe that Mussidan had told her his object in leaving the prison on that particular night. In such a case she might be tried as the baron's accomplice. Now, the ex-jailer longed for revenge, but he did not want to lose his wife ; and it would be impossible to secure an order for Adhémar's arrest without disclosing what had occurred at the prison while Adhémar was there.

Marteau, more perplexed than ever, repeated all this to himself over and over again, as he walked slowly down the Boulevard des Italiens ; and he had just reached Tortoni's, when upon the steps of that famous establishment, he suddenly perceived the very man who had engrossed his thoughts ever since his interview with Coralie Bernache. The handsome Adhémar was munching a tooth-pick with all the apparent lightheartedness of a young man of fashion who has just lunched well, and who has no annoyances, much less any remorse. Pierre's blood curdled, and, had he obeyed his first impulse, he would have sprung at the baron's throat. But he knew how to control himself, and, instead of giving way to useless passion, he turned round the first corner into the Rue Taitbout, and paused there, firmly resolved to follow Adhémar until he ascertained where he was staying.

A moment afterwards, he saw the baron leisurely descend the boulevard

like a lounge who intends to stroll about a little before returning home. Marteau allowed him to get a little in advance, and then began to follow him. Adhémar, who had not the slightest suspicion that he was being tracked, never once turned to look behind him. On reaching the corner of the Rue du Helder, however, he hesitated for an instant, asking himself whether he should go to see his old friend, Clara Lasource, who lived in the Rue Saint-Lazare, or inquire after M. de Sigoulès, whom he had not seen that morning, and after a little reflection he decided on the latter course. Marteau saw him enter the Hôtel du Helder, and wishing to satisfy himself that it was really there that he was staying, he entered the establishment as soon as the baron had vanished up the staircase, and said to the porter: "You have Monsieur de Mussidan here, I believe?"

"Yes; he just came in," replied the porter, "and if he is not in his own room, No. 22, he must be in the apartments of the Count de Sigoulès, on the second floor, No. 15."

This was all that Marteau wished to know. He had no intention of going up the stairs for the time being, and he was on the point of walking away when, to his great surprise, he saw Edmée Chancelade approaching the porter's lodge. He immediately turned his back on her, and pretended to be looking in his pocket-book for a card, flattering himself that she had not noticed him. Besides this meeting was a piece of extraordinary good luck for he had not at all abandoned his idea of recapturing Chancelade, and now that he had found the sister, he would only have to keep her in sight to reach the brother, for he presumed that they had been living together since their arrival in Paris. This was a new clue that must be followed up immediately, and there was no necessity for him to dog Mussidan's footsteps, as he knew exactly where to find him whenever he wanted him. So he proceeded to ensconce himself in the passage of a house opposite the hotel, where he waited with his coat-collar turned up about his ears, and his hat pulled down over his eyes. He did not have to wait long, but it was not Edmée who emerged from the hotel. On the contrary, it was Adhémar de Mussidan.

"What! he is going out again already!" muttered Marteau. "So much the better. I don't want anything more of him just at present, and in this way he won't be at hand to prevent me from following Chancelade's sister."

However, Adhémar, instead of stepping into the street, remained at the doorway of the hotel, glancing up and down the thoroughfare, like a man who wishes to satisfy himself that the coast is clear.

"That is strange!" thought Marteau. "One would fancy that he was afraid of being watched. Besides, how does it happen that he is going out again so soon? I suppose he didn't find his cousin at home. But he must have met that Salviac girl on the staircase. Heaven grant that she did not recognise me and tell him!"

Marteau endeavoured to reassure himself, but it soon seemed to him that the baron's eyes were fixed persistently upon his hiding-place, and he hastily drew back. This was a useless precaution, however, for Adhémar crossed the street with a decided step, walked straight towards the passage, entered it, and called out: "Monsieur Marteau!"

The ex-jailer did not reply. For a moment he felt strongly inclined to take to his heels, but he knew that Mussidan would follow him, so he only drew further back into the shadow, and remained silent. "Don't be childish, Monsieur Marteau," said the scornful baron, "I know you are there."

Why are you playing at hide-and-seek? Come out here. I want to speak to you."

As the ex-jailer was unable to make his escape, the only course was to show himself. Besides, the anger surging up in his heart impelled him to face his enemy. "Here I am!" he said, sullenly. "What do you want with me?"

As he spoke, he planted himself a couple of feet in front of Adhémar, and looked him insolently in the face.

"So you consent to show yourself at last," responded Adhémar with unruffled calmness; "but that isn't enough. This is a very poor place for a conversation, as we are liable to be interrupted at any moment. Will you have the goodness to step outside? We can talk much better in the street."

"Very well," repeated Pierre, and he followed the baron out of the passage.

When they both reached the pavement, Mussidan said to him quietly, looking him full in the face: "By what right do you attempt to spy on me? You are not a jailer now, nor am I any longer under your charge."

"What makes you think that I am watching you?" retorted Marteau.

"You are not going to pretend that you are here merely by chance, I suppose."

"I am not responsible to you for my actions."

"Excuse me, you have followed me, and you just made some inquiries about me of the hotel porter. I should like to know why, if you please? Oh! you needn't attempt to deny it. Some one saw you."

"It was Chancelade's sister who gave you the information, I suppose?"

"You recognised her, it seems."

"Perfectly."

"And you were waiting to see where she would go on leaving the hotel. Well, you can spare yourself the trouble of following her. Her brother is safe on the other side of the Atlantic."

"What object can you have in telling me that? Chancelade was once in my custody, it is true; but I am no longer a jailer."

"No, you are a detective. Don't contradict me. I learned the fact through my relative, Monsieur de Sigoulès, who is well acquainted with General de Plancoët, the patron who secured you your present honourable position."

"Well, even supposing that what you say is true, what of it?" asked Pierre, angrily.

"Nothing, except that I forbid you—do you understand?—I forbid you to follow Mademoiselle Chancelade. If you follow me, I will soon give you enough of it; but she is a woman, and she can not get rid of you. So I will rid her of you myself, if you dare to attempt it."

"In what way, pray?"

"By thrashing you within an inch of your life."

Pierre turned frightfully pale, and several seconds elapsed before he could control his anger sufficiently to reply. "Sir," he said, at last in a voice husky with passion, "you have just uttered words that will cost you dear. I served my time honourably in the army, and whatever my present position may be, you owe me satisfaction, for the threat you have just made is a grave insult."

"Less grave than its execution, and I shall not shrink from that if you persist in playing the spy upon this young girl. You may have been a soldier, but you are now a police spy, and no one condescends to fight

a duel with a police spy. Still, I hate you so heartily that I would really do you the honour to accept you as an adversary if I were sure that you would let Mademoiselle Chancelade alone afterwards. Unfortunately, I can't take your word for that."

"I also hate you," said Marteau, sullenly; "and it was not necessary for you to insult me to give me a longing to kill you."

"Indeed!" sneered the baron. "And why do you hate me so intensely? I should really like to know."

"You really ought to suspect the cause," replied the ex-jailer, unable to control himself any longer.

"On the contrary, I haven't the slightest idea of it," was the cool rejoinder.

"You have very quickly forgotten what passed between my wife and yourself at Salviac?"

"I do not understand you," replied Adhémar, perfectly unmoved.

"Yes, you pride yourself upon being a gentleman," replied Aurélie's husband, bitterly, "and men of your stamp believe that they have a right to lie in order to save a woman. But your insolent denials are of no use. I know everything, and you will not dare to pretend that an honourable man can refuse an outraged husband satisfaction."

The baron was greatly annoyed by the turn the conversation was taking. However, he responded carelessly,

"Upon my word, sir, I had no idea you were so sensitive."

"A truce to this insolence, and don't persist in your denials. I have proofs."

"Proofs! This is the first time I ever heard a husband, who pretended to have been so grievously wronged, talk like an investigating magistrate. As you please, sir, but I beg of you to take notice that I admit nothing."

"And you are quite right. If you admitted that my wife visited you in your cell, you would also be obliged to admit that she helped you to leave the prison at night-time, and to return to it before daybreak. And such a confession on your part might take you far."

Adhémar had not anticipated this direct thrust, and he remained silent for a moment; but he quickly recovered himself, and instead of retorting by a denial, he said in a most impertinent tone: "Was it Madame Marteau who gave you this interesting information?"

"Think what you like."

"If it was not she, it must have been her cousin."

"You know perfectly well that the person referred to is not at all related to my wife. But it makes no difference whether I learned this through her or discovered it myself. The facts remain the same, and I trust you will not refuse me the satisfaction I demand."

"I do not absolutely refuse," replied Adhémar, who was beginning to view the situation in a different light, "but the deuce take me if I expected such a proposal from you. You surprise me very much."

"Yes, you took me for a peaceable, inoffensive man, who could be deceived and insulted with impunity. I am not a nobleman, but I have been a soldier, and I will show you that I know how to wield a sword."

This was no idle boasting. Pierre Marteau had acted as fencing-master in his regiment, and at heart he felt sure of his ability to kill Adhémar. In fact, this certainty on his part was the principal cause of the sudden change in his plans. He would have preferred to denounce his enemy as the commissary's murderer, and to deliver him up to justice; but he

lacked proofs, and besides, he was restrained by a fear of compromising Aurélie; so it would be better to end the matter by a duel in which he would have every advantage. The baron, on the other hand, realised that if his nocturnal excursions became known to the magistrates, he would be placed in a very unenviable position, and find it difficult to defend himself against a capital charge. The judicial authorities of Salviac must be greatly prejudiced against him, especially the assessor whom Vignory had so severely snubbed in the presence of M. de Sigoulès at the club, and the ex-keeper, if his challenge were not accepted, would be sure to report the facts to the authorities. Moreover, Adhémar said to himself that, after all, this ex-jailer had a right to demand satisfaction, that he had been a non-commissioned officer, and that this was one of the cases in which an honourable man could and should fight no matter whom. Besides, the baron was a capital swordsman, and flattered himself that a well-directed thrust would rid Edmée, Louis, Aurélie and himself of Marteau for ever. "Very well," said he, "as you so urgently insist upon it, I will consent—provided that the duel shall be no sham affair, and that it shall end the matter."

"You need have no fears that it will be anything but serious," replied Pierre. "And there will be no necessity to begin over again, for we will fight until one of us falls dead."

"If our seconds will allow me to do so," replied Adhemar, ironically. "But we must procure seconds."

"I will promise to procure mine, and I accept yours in advance," replied Pierre Marteau. "I shall choose a couple of my former comrades in the army."

"Who are ignorant of the calling you now follow? Well, if you can find two of them, I shall make no objection. But what reason shall you give for this duel, for I suppose you don't care to drag Madame Marteau's name into the affair."

"I shall give the first pretext that comes into my head. Besides, my friends won't ask for any explanation. Where can they find you?"

"At the Hôtel du Helder, where I am staying with Monsieur de Sigoulès, who will probably serve as one of my seconds."

"Very well, sir. You will hear from me to-morrow."

"I shall expect to, and I trust that you will now abandon your intended surveillance. Mademoiselle Chancelade will soon come out, and I hope she will not find you mounting guard in front of the hotel."

"I promise to pay no further attention to her; in fact, I shall leave here immediately. Till we meet again, sir." As Marteau spoke he turned and walked rapidly towards the boulevard, after exchanging a tolerably courteous bow with his future adversary. He had no idea of returning to his hiding-place, for he felt sure that M. de Mussidan would warn Chancelade's sister, and, perhaps, even act as her escort, when she left the hotel.

Adhémar on his side immediately recrossed the street, for he was anxious to see Edmée again. She had overtaken him as he was ascending the staircase of the hotel, and had told him that the ex-warder of the Salviac prison was talking with the porter. She had then hastened on to M. de Sigoulès' rooms, and Adhémar had rushed down-stairs to put an end to Marteau's spying. He now had to announce the result of his expedition to those interested in it, but he did not intend to speak about the projected duel, at least in Edmée's presence. He had not seen M. de Sigoulès for twenty-four hours, and was consequently ignorant of the fact that his

relative had miraculously discovered Edmée in a boarding-house at Montmartre, so that he had been greatly astonished to find her paying the count a visit in the Rue du Helder when he had supposed her still at Salviac. He now hastened up to the count's room, and found his cousin engaged in an animated conversation with the young girl. They were not quarrelling, but they certainly were not of the same mind, for M. de Sigoulès had raised his voice to a much higher key than was customary with him when conversing with a lady. Edmée was talking in a more subdued tone, but she was evidently deeply in earnest, for her cheeks were red, and her eyes sparkled with excitement. "Your arrival is very opportune," exclaimed M. de Sigoulès, on seeing Adhémar. "You will help me to make this headstrong girl listen to reason. Would you believe it, she wants to marry Jacques—you know Jacques, my former gamekeeper?"

"I know him," replied Adhémar. "He is a brave fellow, and would make a capital soldier."

"Very true; but how about marrying him?" said the count.

"He risked his life to save my brother," said Edmée, firmly.

"And he is here in Paris with her brother," interrupted M. de Sigoulès. "They are both hiding somewhere in Montmartre, and mademoiselle here sees them frequently. As all the police are on their track, this is folly, and worse than folly, you must admit."

"Very generous folly, I think," corrected Mussidan. "As for the detectives, mademoiselle knows that they are watching her, for she just informed me that the ex-warder of the Salviac prison was down-stairs; however, I have had a talk with him, and I don't think he will give any of us further trouble."

"What! you have been talking with that scoundrel?"

"I was obliged to speak to him in order to send him away. I will tell you presently what I told him, and I feel sure that you will approve of it. Will you allow me, mademoiselle, to ask you how you expect to extricate your brother and his friend Jacques from the dangerous position in which they have placed themselves by coming to Paris?"

"We only need passports to enable us to leave France, and someone has promised to procure them for me."

"Oh, yes," said M. de Sigoulès, ironically, "that widow who scraped acquaintance with you in the Bordeaux diligence, I suppose. If you wait until she gets them, you will no doubt wait a long time. And, speaking of this very obliging person, it would be as well for you to know, Adhémar, that she pretends she is acquainted with you."

"With me! Where did she make my acquaintance, pray?" asked M. de Mussidan.

"At Bordeaux, probably, as she came from there."

"Then the acquaintance must date from a remote period, for I have not been to Bordeaux for seven or eight years. What is her name?"

"She calls herself Madame Bastide. That is to say, Bastide is her maiden name," replied Edmée.

"Jeanne Bastide!" exclaimed the baron. "The daughter of the captain of a merchant vessel?"

"Who died upon one of his voyages? Yes. She had only her mother left her when she married."

"Did she tell you the name of the man she married?" inquired Mussidan, with singular eagerness.

"No. She only told me that, after shamefully deceiving her, he had made her life unspeakably wretched."

"Does she know that the scoundrel is dead?"

"She does; for she wears mourning for him."

"She might have dispensed with that, I think. Did she tell you the manner of his death?"

"No. But it seems that he was in the employment of the government, and that being the case, she thought she had a right to a pension, and came to Paris to claim it. But her application has been refused."

"What! does she need a pension? She had a little fortune in former years."

"Her husband squandered it, and she is now left entirely without resources. She has barely enough money left to pay for her passage to America, where she is going with us."

"That is to say, with you, your brother, and Jacques?"

"Yes; and she hopes to procure passports for us all by pretending that we are relatives of hers."

"Then you intend to sail under assumed names?" exclaimed M. de Sigoulès. "Do you imagine that you will be able to start without proving your identity? Your plan is absurd."

"It is our only hope," murmured the young girl.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," interrupted the Baron de Mussidan, "but has this lady met your brother?"

"She saw him yesterday for the first time. I was with her when she met him. I had been looking for him all the morning in vain, but chanced him to the summit of Montmartre, just as we were descending from it."

"And you introduced them to each other?"

"I could not do otherwise, and I don't regret having done so, for Louis took a fancy to her, and I fancy she was much pleased with him."

"Another marriage in prospect!" growled the count.

"Louis Chancelade might do much worse," replied Adhémar.

"So what she said is true. You must know her, as you have such a good opinion of her."

"I know her well enough to be able to assure you that she is a charming woman, and deserves the warmest sympathy."

"What enthusiasm!" said M. de Sigoulès. "A little more, and you would declare you were one of her admirers."

"That is an impossibility," replied the baron, quickly. "I must even beg Mademoiselle Edmée not to tell her friend that she has seen me."

"And yet you advocate her marrying Louis Chancelade! I confess that I fail to understand you," said M. de Sigoulès.

"It is not necessary that you should understand me, my dear cousin." And then turning to Edmée, Adhémar continued: "Did you say that this lady knows your brother's unfortunate position?"

"She knows that the police are after him, and that he will be obliged to remain in concealment until he can leave France."

"But does she know what crime he is accused of?"

"No; she thinks that he was arrested on account of participating in the insurrection last December."

"Ah! well, promise me never to tell her that he is accused of murdering Monsieur Santelli."

"Had I cared to tell her, I should have done so before now. But the

secret belongs to my brother. He alone has the right to reveal it to anyone."

"Well, advise your brother to keep it to himself, at least until his innocence is proved—as it certainly will be sooner or later."

"How do you know that?" asked M. de Sigoulès, brusquely.

"I shall make it my business to prove it, if necessary: but it is more than probable that I sha'n't have to interfere, for I am about to rid him of his most dangerous enemy, I hope—that fellow, Marteau, whom I just dismissed."

"You mustn't be over sure, Adhémar," said M. de Sigoulès. "And as for you, my dear Edmée, mind you are prudent. That spy, Marteau, has but one aim in life—that is to recapture his former prisoner, and he will continue to watch you, whatever my cousin may say to the contrary. So, abstain from seeing your brother any more at present, if you wish him to escape Monsieur Marteau's clutches. As regards your new friend, I agree with my cousin. Do not reveal too many of your secrets to her. I myself am going to see what I can do for you. I shall speak to General de Plancoët about Louis, and through his influence I hope to induce the authorities to abandon their pursuit, or at least to shut their eyes to his departure for a foreign land."

"Don't forget Jacques, cousin," added Adhémar, smiling at Edmée.

"Jacques isn't concerned in the matter," replied M. de Sigoulès, rather sulkily. "He has made himself liable to a few months' imprisonment for poaching, but he can get out of that scrape without any assistance from me. And now," he added, turning to the young girl, "you had better return home. I will have a cab sent for; for I don't want you to return on foot. You might be followed."

## X.

LUCIEN DORADOUR, Louis Chancelade's compatriot and friend, was a worthy man, who, after starting in life as a pedlar, had, by industry and economy, finally succeeded in acquiring a modest competence. He was now a dealer in second-hand clothing, rags, old iron, and even bric-à-brac. He bought and sold everything, keeping his goods in a shop he rented at Clignancourt: but he ran about Paris all day, and seldom returned until late in the evening to the little house where he had lived alone prior to the arrival of the two friends to whom he had granted a shelter. Doradour had known Chancelade from his infancy, and although he had bidden farewell to Salviac for good, he had been in the habit of writing from time to time to his old school-mate, who had answered him regularly. On receiving the letter in which Louis had craved his hospitality, he had not hesitated to place his house at the disposal of the two fugitives, although he had never seen Jacques in his life. They lived very comfortably there, without interfering with one another in the least. Doradour took his meals away from home, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another; and Chancelade and Jacques got on very well without a cook, accustomed as they had long been to wait upon themselves. Jacques purchased the provisions, and Louis assisted him in preparing a few simple dishes. They retired to rest with the chickens, and merely saw their friend Doradour in the morning, before he started off on his daily round; indeed, the neighbours seemed to be scarcely aware of their existence, so quiet and retired was their life,



It is true that they lived at the end of a sort of lane in which there were only three or four houses, and which was but little frequented. Doradour had a garden about as large as a modest drawing-room, and very badly kept, as he lacked both the leisure and the taste to cultivate flowers. His house was entered through this garden which was provided with an iron railing and gate; the latter being but seldom opened, for Doradour was rarely at home, and when he was, he had few or no visitors.

During the early days of their sojourn the fugitives often walked about the garden, pondering over the state of their affairs. They were expecting a letter from Edmée—a letter that did not come, however, and without Edmée's assistance they could not escape from a position which, in point of fact, was much more wearisome than dangerous. They finally grew tired of inactivity, and it was then, and not until then, that Chancelade sent Jacques to Coralie. There then came the visit to the masquerade ball, which almost had such fatal consequences. Jacques went home alone that night, for Louis did not turn up until the following day, having fallen into Coralie's snares. He was not in love with her, however, and he regretted his weakness, and especially the fact that he had unguardedly given her the address of the house where Jacques and he were hiding. He was consoled, however, on the morrow, when he so unexpectedly met his sister again. Edmée found once more! Edmée ready to accompany him to America! This was greater happiness than he had dared to hope for. And as blessings, like misfortunes, never come singly, Edmée had introduced him to a lady who had made a deep impression upon him.

The romantic side of the adventure had its influence, of course. Madame Bastide had fallen into his arms just as he was endeavouring to walk off his anxiety and annoyance, and it seemed to him that there was something providential about this strange meeting. Chancelade had always been imaginative and rather susceptible, and the persecution to which he had been subjected for more than a month had increased his natural tendency to exaggerate the significance of trifling incidents. When his sister had given him a brief account of her new friend, he felt even more deeply interested in the charming widow. She, also, was unhappy; she, also, thought of leaving her native land. Why should they not soothe each other's grief, and endeavour to make each other happy?

Edmée had not had time to tell him very much about Madame Bastide, and she had not seen him since their first meeting; so she had no means of knowing what he thought of her new friend, but she must have guessed, and Chancelade felt almost certain that she thought as he did, for they generally agreed in their opinions of people. Still, he wished to consult her, and he would have gone to the spot appointed for their meeting on the very next day, had not Jacques begged to be allowed to see Edmée. Chancelade could, of course, have accompanied him, but he felt that after such a long separation, the lovers would prefer to be alone. So, on the very same day, while the Baron de Mussidan and Pierre Marteau were talking in the Rue du Helder, Louis Chancelade found himself alone in his friend Doradour's modest house, and as the weather happened to be delightful, he went out into the garden to smoke his pipe and think of Madame Bastide. The young widow's pretty face haunted him; and it seemed to him that he could still hear her sweet voice.

He was aroused from his reverie by a much less pleasant sound, however. Some one was vigorously shaking the iron gate, and the first idea that occurred to Louis was that the police were trying to force an entrance;

but he soon recollected that there was no bell to the gate, and that an visitor, unprovided with a key, could only announce his arrival by shaking the rusty bars. Still, this was the first time that any stranger had called since Chancelade had been staying there, for Doradour transacted all his business at his shop, and never received customers at home. The noise continuing, Chancelade decided to approach the gate, but he did so very cautiously, keeping as much out of sight as possible. Standing outside, however, he saw a woman dressed in black and closely veiled—a woman who was certainly not Edmée, but whom he mistook for Madame Bastide, perhaps because the wish was father to the thought. Accordingly, he hastened to the gate to open it, but his illusion was instantly dispelled, for the person standing outside thus addressed him: “Well, here you are at last, and I am certainly glad of it. I have been bruising my fingers here for at least half an hour. I am almost sure that I have blistered them.”

It was the voice of Coralie Bernache, and any lingering doubts that Louis might have felt in regard to his visitor's identity vanished, for she immediately proceeded to raise her veil. Nothing could have annoyed Louis more than this ill-timed visit, but he saw no way to avoid it, for if he had refused to open the gate, a scene would have inevitably ensued, the neighbours would have come to their windows, and then the consequences might have proved serious. Fully realising all this, Louis reluctantly drew the bolt and motioned Coralie to enter. “How strangely you act!” she remarked. “One would say that you were not particularly pleased to see me.”

“I—I certainly was not expecting the honour of a visit from you,” stammered poor Chancelade. “In fact, you promised me that you would not come here—”

“Nor should I have done so, if you had come to see me, as you half promised you would, you bad fellow.” And thereupon Coralie threw her arms round Louis' neck, and began to kiss him. “Ah!” said she, as she sat down on a little bench in a corner of the garden. “I have been thinking of you ever since we parted; and now I want you to guess who I saw this morning.”

“I haven't the slightest idea,” replied Chancelade, rather abstractedly, for he cared very little about knowing what had befallen Mademoiselle Bernache since he had parted from her in the Rue Mogador.

“Ah, well, I won't keep you in suspense. A few hours ago, just as I was leaving home, whom should I meet at the corner of the street but that spy who followed us at the masquerade ball.”

“Pierre Marteau?”

“Precisely, and I am satisfied that he was coming to see me, although he would not admit it. But, however that may have been, I certainly fooled him capitally. In fact, I flatter myself that I have delivered you from his persecution for ever.”

“What! he has abandoned the idea of finding me. That's impossible! He is paid for it, you know.”

“Yes, we saw him at work on Thursday night; but I began by telling him that the domino who escorted me home from the masquerade was a Russian Prince, who had arrived the evening before from Moscow; and then, in the course of our conversation, I remarked that you had sailed for America, and that old Sigoulès had just received a letter from you, written in New York; and finally, I thought it best to start him off on a false scent, and I succeeded in doing so.”

"How?"

"By convincing him that the real murderer of the commissary general, was that handsome fellow Mussidan."

"Monsieur de Mussidan! But he wasn't the murderer. You have accused an innocent man."

"I don't know whether the baron is innocent or not, but I do know that he and Aurélie carried on in a fine way during his stay in the Salviac prison, and you know that as well as I do."

"I hope you did not inform her husband of the fact?"

"I certainly did, and it only served her right, after the way she treated me. She hasn't been near me since she arrived in Paris."

"Still that was no reason why you should betray a secret she confided to you. You did it merely to make mischief."

"You think so, do you, simpleton? Well, if I betrayed Aurélie, it was not for the sake of revenge, but merely to get you safely out of your difficulties."

"I don't understand you," said Louis, drily.

"Well, reason a little. I could not accuse Mnssidan of having murdered the commissary without saying that he was in the habit of leaving the prison at night-time whenever he pleased, and I could not say that he did so without disclosing the state of affairs between Aurélie and himself; for, though she allowed you, also, to leave the prison, it was only because the baron compelled her to do so."

"Is all this quite true?" asked Chancelade, frowning.

"Perfectly true. I obtained my information from Aurélie, who certainly could have had no object in misrepresenting the facts. And between ourselves, I should not be very much surprised if Mussidan did commit the murder."

"I refuse to believe that. Why should he have killed a man who never injured him?"

"Are you going to undertake his defence? You talk as if you were his lawyer. Very well, I will answer you as if I were the public prosecutor. Mussidan might have had grievances, that we know nothing about, against this commissary. Besides, it is his business to prove his innocence, if he can—when he is arrested."

"What! does Marteau really think of arresting him?"

"I should say he did! He will never rest until he has avenged himself upon the man who deceived him, and he could not have a better revenge than sending him to the guillotine. So you see Marteau is not likely to give you any further trouble. Now tell me again, if you dare, that I did wrong to tell him what I did about his wife—"

"I say that it was an infamous denunciation," retorted Chancelade, furiously.

"Infamous!" repeated Coralie, beginning to get angry in her turn. "This is really too much! You forget that I did it to save you. You are no match for an old stager like Marteau, and if I hadn't interfered you would have been sent to the guillotine."

"I have no desire to be saved at such a price; and I tell you that if Monsieur de Mussidan be arrested, I shall surrender myself in order to be able to testify in his behalf."

"Testify! Why, you know nothing whatever about the affair! What could you do, except acknowledge yourself the culprit? And, unless you are mad, you surely won't accuse yourself of a crime you did not commit."

"I shall say that Monsieur de Mussidan might easily have escaped, but refused to do so. No one will believe that he would have remained in prison of his own free will had his head been in danger. I did not remain there when an opportunity to make my escape presented itself."

Coralie started. A new idea had just presented itself to her mind. Incapable of understanding Louis' elevated sentiments, she began to wonder if he had not really committed the murder, and she was so constituted that this suspicion did not appall her—quite the contrary. This frivolous woman was absolutely devoid of principle, and in her secret heart it mattered very little to her if her lover had a crime upon his conscience, providing he pleased her. "Listen," she said, in quite a different tone. "I am sure that you are concealing the truth from me. You think it would horrify me to learn that you fired the shot that has caused all this trouble. You don't know me. Your confession would not alter my feelings in the least. Tell me all—tell me that you can not bear the thought of allowing the baron to be condemned in your stead; admit that it was you who killed that spy."

"You take me for a murderer then?" cried Chancelade.

"Don't put on airs, but answer me frankly. Was it you, yes or no? If it was, I shall feel all the more glad that I have relieved you of Marteau, for he would certainly have caught you some day or other."

"He will have even less difficulty in catching the innocent man you have denounced."

"You are absurd with your talk about innocence. There is no one you can truthfully call innocent, in this world, except, perhaps, a new-born babe, and it is a long while since Mussidan was weaned. If he were in your place, and you in his, he wouldn't show so much anxiety to get you out of the scrape at his own expense."

"I can't say what he would do, but I should certainly be a vile scamp if I allowed him to be condemned."

"What, again! You really madden me with your display of lofty sentiments, and I begin to think that you are much more cunning than you appear to be. You are trying to pick a quarrel with me, because you have seen enough of me, I suppose. I'm a good-natured girl, but when a man treats me badly, I am not fool enough to run after him. I always have my revenge, and you will repent of the way you treat me." Coralie was now so thoroughly incensed that she had quite forgotten her good manners.

"What do you reproach me with?" asked Chancelade, coldly.

"I reproach you with treating me with contempt when you ought to thank me on your knees for what I have done for you. Because I was foolish enough to take a fancy to you, you think you can snub me as you like, and that I shall still be only too glad to remain your slave. You are very much mistaken, my fine sir. You shall do as I say—"

Chancelade, whose patience was now entirely exhausted, sprung up from the bench upon which they had been sitting side by side, and said sternly: "You seem to have lost your senses, and I must ask you to go away."

"You order me off," cried Coralie.

"I do not order you off, but I think this ridiculous scene has lasted quite long enough."

"Why can't you muster up courage to acknowledge that you have another sweetheart, and that you are expecting her now?" This random shot fired by the jealous Coralie, disconcerted Louis completely. He has steeled himself against insults, but he was not prepared for an attack of this kind, and he did not know how to parry it. "You are silent," continued Coralie,

"you are silent, because you dare not deny it. She is coming here—that is, unless she is here already. Show me the minx you prefer to me. Is it some shepherdess of Salviac who followed you to Paris? She must be very ugly since you hide her so carefully. To think that this is my reward for all I have done for you! God, alive! it's too bad. But I won't go off till I've seen her. Tell me, is it—why, yes, it is—it must be—Aurélié. Mussidan won't have anything more to do with her, so she has fallen back on you."

"Once more, I tell you that you are mad!" cried Chancelade, overwhelmed by this torrent of senseless words.

And Coralie must, indeed, have lost her senses to see a rival in the person of Madame Marteau, who had not met Edmée's brother since his escape from prison, and who did not even know that he was in Paris. But once started, La Bernache could not be checked. "I understand it all now," she continued; "I understand why you are so angry with me for having denounced her to her husband. It upsets all your plans. Aurélié won't dare to come and see you here any more. Marteau will keep an eye on her in future, and she won't find it so easy to deceive him. There is a very easy way for him to get rid of you, however. He need only have you arrested. That will teach you not to make love to a detective's wife."

"You have it in your power to hand me over to him, of course," replied Chancelade, coolly. "Do so, if you like. I should get only what I deserve for having trusted you."

"I certainly shall do so, unless you convince me that I am mistaken. Do you despise me so thoroughly that you scorn to defend yourself?"

"A man doesn't defend himself from an absurd charge."

"Absurd! So it isn't true? That's fortunate, for I don't know what I should do if I heard that you cared for any other woman—I really believe I should send you back to prison: but you won't reduce me to such an extremity, will you?" added Coralie, darting a languishing glance at Louis. She had beautiful eyes, and Louis, it should be remembered, was under thirty. She realised the effect she had produced, and taking hold of his hand, she added, "Shall we make peace? Well, tell me that you love me, and that you are not expecting anybody else. I don't ask better than to forgive you, you bad fellow."

The quarrel had taken place in the garden, only a short distance from the gate, for they had gradually approached the street without being conscious of it. At present, Coralie had changed her tactics, and holding Louis' hand, she stood close beside him, whispering tender words in his ear. Suddenly, however, she roughly pushed him away, for, happening to raise her eyes, she saw a lady standing before them.

Louis had forgotten to fasten the gate on Coralie's arrival, so that the new-comer had only had to push it open. Chancelade recognised his visitor at a glance, but Coralie, who had never seen her, uttered a cry of rage. "So this is the person you were expecting," she shouted, shaking her fist at Chancelade. "You cannot deny it. Now I understand your anxiety to get rid of me. Ah! well, you need not trouble yourself any further, I am going. You will soon hear from me, however. Enjoy yourself at my expense with your sweetheart; but you won't laugh long!" and, thereupon, she rushed from the garden without giving Chancelade a chance to utter a word.

The lady whose sudden appearance had brought about this scene stood for a moment as if petrified; at last, however, she faltered, "Excuse me,

sir, I called at the request of Mademoiselle Edmée, your sister ; but had I known that you were not alone—”

“It is I, madame, who must apologise,” said Chancelade, impetuously. “The person who just left surprised me here—came in spite of me—and you have done me a great service by relieving me of her company.”

Nothing could induce Louis to tell Madame Bastide the whole truth in regard to the stormy interview she had just interrupted. Her unexpected visit delighted him, but he bitterly cursed the chance that had brought her into Coralie's presence.

“I have no explanation to ask of you,” she said, quietly. “You are surely at liberty to receive whom you please, and your sister did not send me here to learn your secrets. You requested me to come in her stead should it be dangerous for her to call on you, and that is the case to-day.”

“What has happened ?” inquired Louis, anxiously.

“Nothing very serious so far ; but last evening, after we left you, we dined at the *table d'hôte* of the establishment where we are staying, and it so happened that one of the boarders had invited the Count de Sigoulès, whom you know, I suppose.”

“Very well. My father was one of his tenants, and he was very kind to Edmée after my arrest.”

“He recognised her instantly, though he was prudent enough not to show it. But after dinner he found a means of speaking to her in private, and asked her to call on him to-day at his hotel, in the Rue du Helder. Your sister did so ; but on entering the hotel, she saw that a man was watching her, and this man proved to be the former chief-warder of the Salviac prison.”

“Marteau ! We are lost !”

“No ; for she succeeded in escaping from him. One of the count's relatives, the Baron de Mussidan, happened to be there. I do not know what he said to this man, but he succeeded in making him decamp. Shortly afterwards Edmée returned to Montmartre in a cab, and she feels sure she was not followed. However, Monsieur de Sigoulès made her promise that she would not see you at present. It will be very difficult, he says, to succeed in making arrangements for your departure abroad, if either of you are guilty of the slightest imprudence ; and the most imprudent thing that Edmée could do would, in his opinion, be to visit you, for the police will probably keep an eye on her in future. That is the reason she sent me here in her stead. She wished you to know the situation : my errand is done, and I will now bid you good-bye.”

“Already ?” murmured Chancelade, sadly.

“I must. The lady who just left here may return.”

“Allow me, at least, to explain her visit. You just explained Edmée's situation : you surely won't refuse to tell her mine ?”

“No ; not if you will explain it to me.”

“Ah ! well tell her that I have just transformed that woman into a dangerous enemy, and that I can not remain any longer at the house of the friend who has so kindly sheltered me.”

“Yes, that person did go off, vowing vengeance. I heard her ; but did you offend her so deeply ?” inquired Madame Bastide, looking searchingly at Louis.

“I told her never to set foot here again. She went away furiously angry, and I think her quite capable of denouncing me to that very man Marteau who is after me.”

“That would be infamous ! Still you would succeed in vindicating your-

self, I hope, even if you were arrested. Edmée told me that you were accused of taking part in a revolt that followed the *coup d'état*. The days of rigorous measures are past."

"If it had been merely a question of that insurrection, in which, by the way, I took no part whatever, I should have surrendered long ago. But I am going to tell you the truth, madame. I am accused of having murdered a government commissary, a man named Santelli."

"You!" exclaimed Madame Bastide, suddenly becoming pale and agitated. "You were the man who shot that—"

"Do I look like a murderer?" asked Chancelade, straightening himself up proudly.

"No, certainly not; but how does it happen that such a terrible crime is imputed to you?"

"It would take too long to tell you how it all happened. Edmée can explain matters much better than I can, and I am surprised that she has not done so before this. She was afraid of horrifying you, probably."

The young widow seemed deeply moved; and it was not until after a long pause that she overcame her emotion sufficiently to say: "I am not your judge, but I am your sister's devoted friend, and I can therefore expect the truth from you. Swear to me, upon your word of honour, that you are not the person who killed Monsieur Santelli."

"I swear it," replied Chancelade, without the slightest hesitation. "I swear it, upon my honour—by my own life—by my sister's, and I hope that God will allow me to prove my innocence; but if I should be arrested at present, I should certainly be convicted, for appearances are strongly against me, and human justice is liable to err—especially in regard to a political crime. That is why my only course is flight to a foreign land."

Madame Bastide's beautiful dark eyes, which had been for a moment dimmed by an emotion Louis could not explain, now regained their wonted brilliancy, and she seemed to breathe more freely.

"And if it be true, madame," added Chancelade, "that you wish to leave France, as Edmée assured me yesterday, and will consent to accompany us, exile will have no terrors for me."

"I am sure that I should feel glad not to be separated from your sister, but if you leave France, what will the person who just left us think?" inquired the pretty widow, with a faint smile.

"I am not accountable to her for my conduct. I scarcely know her—"

"Indeed! She seemed very free with you; but excuse me, sir," resumed Madame Bastide, as she saw Louis flush to the roots of his hair, "I forget that I have no right to question you, and I trust that you will forget the foolish question I just addressed to you. I must now return to your sister, who is anxiously waiting for me."

"Don't go yet, I beg of you," pleaded Louis.

"Oh! I almost forgot that Edmée asked me to tell you that, in obedience to the count's advice, she will not go to meet Monsieur Jacques on the top of the hill to-day."

"He went up there before noon, and he must be there still. I will go and tell him. Besides, it is absolutely necessary that he should know what has transpired between that woman and myself. He knows her; Edmée also knows her."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; and I should like to tell you the whole story if you will consent to listen to it."

"Recollect, if you please, that I ask you no questions," interrupted Madame Bastide, mischievously.

"But I wish you to know all. You are aware that I was imprisoned at Salviac, and that I succeeded in making my escape. Very well. Now, the person you just saw was staying with the chief-warder of the prison while I was there, and she assisted me in making my escape."

"I can hardly wonder, then, at your having seen her again since your arrival in Paris."

"I did not care to see her again, for I felt no confidence in her. However, I sent Jacques to call on her, and that same evening I was foolish enough to attend a ball where she had made an appointment with me through my friend. This ball took place at the Opera House."

"Oh, indeed!" said Madame Bastide, beginning to realise what kind of a woman Coralie was. "May I ask you what occurred at this ball?"

"We there met the ex-chief-warder of the prison where I had been confined. This man is now a member of the detective force, and he was there in an official capacity. He recognised us—I know not how, for we both wore dominoes—and followed us persistently about. In fact, I should have been arrested if Jacques, who was waiting for me at the door of the Opera House, had not noticed that this man was following us; thereupon he ran against him, tripping him up, and while he was apologising, I succeeded in making my escape in a cab."

"Alone?" asked Madame Bastide.

"No; with that—person," answered Louis, with an effort.

"And you drove here?"

"Well, no," said Louis, more and more embarrassed, "I returned here yesterday."

"Then, now I understand that person's free and easy manner with you. What is her name?"

"Coralie Bernache," muttered Louis, contritely. "I hoped that I should never see her again. Her call to-day was a great surprise to me."

"But she could not have come here if you had not given her your address."

"I admit that; but she asked me for it, and I hardly knew how to refuse it. And when once she was here I had to let her in, so as to avoid a scene in the street, which all the neighbours would have noticed."

"She must be a rather dangerous person when she is offended, I should judge."

"Very dangerous. She threatened to denounce me to the authorities."

"Denounce you! Why, that would be infamous!"

"I don't really believe that she will go so far as that, but it is none the less true that I am at her mercy. She knows this spy who is looking for me, and she met him in the street, and had a long talk with him just before she came here."

"Then she would only have to say a word to this man for him to come and arrest you."

"Yes; and when her mind is upset with jealousy she is capable of anything."

"Then it was jealousy that made her threaten you like that?" Chance-lade dare not reply, but his face spoke for him. "If she is jealous of you, it must be because she loves you," said Madame Bastide, who seemed to take a delight in tormenting the poor fellow.

"Such a woman can't love," he murmured.



"You are mistaken. All women can love, even the most frivolous and degraded of their sex. But you must have given her some cause for jealousy. I thought you had seen only your sister and myself."

"What excited her anger was that I undertook the defence of a certain Madame Marteau, the wife of the ex-warder of the Salviac prison. The person you saw boasted of having made trouble between that lady and her husband. I reproached her for doing so, and she fancied that I myself was in love with Madame Marteau, though she ought to have known better; but her anger seemed to have destroyed her reason. What she said, too, was the more unpardonable from the fact that a man who was in prison at the same time as I was, is now likely to be accused of killing the commissary. It seems that the jailer's wife carried on an intrigue with him, and allowed him to leave the prison at night-time whenever he pleased. So, Mademoiselle Bernache, under pretext of proving that I was not guilty of the crime, told the jailer that the murderer was my companion in captivity. She even declared that she was certain of it, and Marteau must have believed her. I reproached her severely for making this charge, and this was the origin of our quarrel."

"But what if this prisoner should really be the culprit?"

"Oh, he isn't. I am no friend of his, though he did me a great service; but I know him well enough to swear that he did not commit such a cowardly crime. Men of his rank don't commit murder."

"Of his rank? Is he a nobleman, then?" inquired Madame Bastide.

"He belongs to one of the noblest families of Périgord," answered Louis. "He is the nearest relative of that Count de Sigoulès, who has interested himself in my sister's behalf, and whom you saw last evening. He was in command of the insurgents during the December affair, and had been in prison for a couple of months when I was taken there."

"What is his name?"

"Adhémar de Mussidan. Do you know him?" added Louis, seeing that the young widow showed unmistakable signs of surprise and agitation.

"I did know him once; but I have not seen him for many years. Indeed, I have no desire to see him again, and as I might happen to meet him—for your sister has already told me that he is now in Paris—I should like to leave France as soon as possible. I shall apply this very day for a passport for America. Monsieur de Sigoulès flatters himself, it seems, that he can obtain three passports—one for your sister, one for your friend Jacques, and one for yourself."

"Then we can depart together!" exclaimed Chancelade.

"Yes, unless Mademoiselle Coralie detains you."

"I, madame? you surely are not in earnest. I heartily detest her, as I just told you."

"Take care; I don't believe in such sudden conversions. Besides, you ought to feel grateful to her, as she assisted you in making your escape."

"I owe a much deeper debt of gratitude to Monsieur de Mussidan, who might have escaped himself, but who gave place to me. If I remained in France, it would be to defend him."

"By accusing yourself?"

"No; for I am not guilty."

"If you confined yourself to pleading his cause, no one would listen to you. You had better think of gaining a place of safety. You can't sail for America to-morrow, but you can leave this house, where you are liable to

be arrested at any moment, now that that person has found the way to it."

"I would leave it immediately if I knew where to go."

"Why shouldn't you join your sister at the boarding house? I can say that I have known you a long time, and the landlady won't doubt my word. The best thing to do would be to tell her the simple truth—that you are Edmée's brother, and that you have just arrived from Bergerac. Remember that your sister calls herself Mademoiselle Vétrines. No one has troubled her since she came to Paris, and no one is likely to trouble you under that name. But, if you prefer it, you can pass yourself off as *my* brother."

"But think how unpleasant it would be for you and Edmée, if I were arrested in your company."

"We should probably be questioned, but we should have no trouble in giving satisfactory answers. What judge or magistrate would dare pretend that any assistance rendered you was a crime? A sister certainly has a right to help her brother, and I should only have to give my name to allay all suspicions, as far as I myself am concerned."

Chancelade did not understand why the name of Bastide should have such a potent influence, but instead of inquiring he raised a fresh objection to the proposed arrangement.

"And Jacques?" he asked, "what should we do about him? I cannot desert him. What would he think if he failed to find me here on his return?"

"That wouldn't worry him if he knew where you had gone. Didn't you tell me that he was waiting for your sister on the top of the hill?"

"Yes; but he won't remain there indefinitely. I am even surprised that he has not returned before now."

"There is nothing to prevent us from going to warn him. I would go alone, if I knew him."

"But what if we missed him on the way? What if, while we are going to meet him, the police should enter this house, guided by Martcau? Jacques would run straight into the wolf's jaws."

"He wouldn't let himself be captured. Edmée has told me all about him, and I feel sure that he would manage to escape the Paris police, just as he always managed to escape the Périgord gendarmes. Recollect, too, that we should not save him by remaining here."

"Do you really think the danger so imminent?"

"That woman threatened you with vengeance, and she can secure a terrible revenge by denouncing you. If she acts at all, she will do so before her anger has had time to cool. She may have gone straight to the spy you spoke of."

"I cannot believe that she will carry her threat into execution."

"But I do. The sight of me seemed to exasperate her, and she probably said to herself that if the officers made haste, they would still find me at your house. She would naturally desire to get me into trouble also, as she mistook me for a rival."

"You are right, madame; and you must leave this place immediately. I should never forgive myself if I involved you in my misfortunes."

"Come with me, then. We shall be sure to meet your friend, and we can then consult with him."

"But I cannot go to your boarding-house on foot, and without any baggage. I must bear some resemblance to a traveller."

"It isn't absolutely necessary that you should go there now, and in

company with me. I will return alone, and after warning Edmée, I will inform Madame Gouverneur that Mademoiselle Védrières expects a brother, and a friend of her brother's this evening. You see I don't forget Monsieur Jacques. I shall say that you will arrive at about nine o'clock. Between now and then you will have time to purchase a trunk, which you can bring with you in a cab. As your supply of money may be nearly exhausted, I have brought you some which your sister, who seems to think of everything, asked me to give you."

"Not now," said Chancelade. "It will be time enough to give it to me when we have found Jacques."

"Then you have no objections to my plan?"

"None whatever. I would willingly follow you to the end of the world."

"You won't have to go so far. Is there anything in the house that might serve to set the police on your track?"

"Nothing. The friend who granted us hospitality here won't trouble himself about us; besides, I shall write to him to-morrow, without indicating our new address. He will understand the reason of our silence."

"Very well; let us start, then."

The young widow passed out first, Chancelade following her closely. He closed the gate behind him. This was equivalent to burning his ships, for he had no key to open it again, Jacques having taken it away with him. The road seemed clear. Nobody was in sight, not even anyone at the windows of the three or four adjacent houses. "We had better take the shortest cut, the one by which I came," remarked Madame Bastide. "We must go to the end of the lane, and then turn to the left, and ascend a flight of steps there."

"Yes," replied Chancelade, "that is the way Jacques always goes; besides, it is the least frequented."

They walked rapidly on, and in a few moments reached the cross-street leading to the steps. Just then a cab turned into the lane they were leaving, and though it was an unusual event for a vehicle to enter that narrow thoroughfare, they were too much pre-occupied to pay any attention to this incident, and they pushed on towards the steps which Madame Bastide had spoken of. As they glanced up they perceived, standing on the topmost step, a couple of policemen, who were quietly talking together, without seeming to notice them in the least. The meeting was none the less a disagreeable one, and they asked each other whether they had better wait until these fellows had left the place, or whether they ought to ascend the steps at the risk of facing them. Their hesitation was of short duration, however, for, after a moment, the officers disappeared as if bent upon following their beat.

"The way is clear. Let us take advantage of our opportunity," exclaimed Louis, and he was about to assist Madame Bastide to ascend the rather steep flight, when he heard hurried footsteps behind him, and suddenly turning found himself face to face with two shabbily-dressed men who, after hastily passing him and giving him a keen glance, went up the steps, stationing themselves upon the first landing. There, each of them drew a tobacco-pouch from his pocket, and began to roll a cigarette. Chancelade at once realised that these men were watching him, and judged that they would follow him if he ascended the steps. "I think we had better go back," he whispered to his companion. "There is another alley a short distance behind us; I will dart into it, and they

won't catch me, you may be sure of that. As for yourself, madame, you had better walk leisurely towards the outer boulevard while they are running after me."

The words had hardly left his lips, when Jacques suddenly appeared at the top of the steps, and, recognising his friend, prepared to run down. The detectives, who were standing with their backs towards him, did not as yet see him. Chancelade at once gave him a sign that meant: "Make yourself scarce!" and Jacques had the presence of mind to scamper off. The detectives on the landing noticed the gesture made by Louis, but when they turned round to see whom it had been intended for, Jacques had disappeared. "They will catch me, perhaps," thought Louis; "but, at all events, they won't catch him."

He now determined to try and escape in his turn. He had turned to the left with Madame Bastide, but by retracing his steps he could take a lane on the right, also leading to the summit of the hill. To succeed in his attempt, however, he must be well ahead of the two detectives, who, upon seeing him turn round, deserted their post of observation on the landing to follow him. Accordingly, he was about to start off on a run when he found himself almost face to face with two other police-agents in plain clothes. At the same instant, he perceived a four-wheeler standing in front of Doradour's house, and from this vehicle there alighted a man dressed in black, who was probably in command of these detectives. Flight would be useless; his retreat was cut off, and it was better to put a good face on the matter. "Talk to me," said Louis to Madame Bastide. "Perhaps they will take us for a pair of lovers." The only thing he could do was to make the best of it.

"There is a woman in the cab," murmured the young widow. "The one I found at your house, no doubt. She went for a commissary of police, and has returned to enjoy her revenge."

"I hope you are mistaken."

"No, I am not mistaken. She has put her head out of the window. Yes, it is she! The commissary turns as if to consult her, and she encourages him with a gesture."

"Ah! I see her!" said Louis in his turn. "I am lost! Leave me, quick! They will not prevent you from passing."

"No, I shall share your fate."

"No, no! If they speak to us, tell them that you don't know me--tell them that you just met me in the street--"

"What good would it do? That woman would contradict me. But you need have no fears for me. I shall only have to tell them my name. They will not arrest me."

While they were advancing, conversing in a low tone, the men who had been standing on the steps were gradually gaining upon them, and Chancelade and his companion being hemmed in, there was nothing left for them but to await the finish. The man dressed in black now walked straight towards them.

"You are Louis Chancelade, are you not?" he said. "You are accused of murder, and you recently escaped from the Salviac prison."

"By what authority do you question me?" inquired M. Marteau's ex-prisoner.

The stranger unbuttoned his overcoat, pointed to a tricolour sash, and drily replied: "I am a commissary of police, and I have a warrant for your arrest."

Chancelade attempted no denial, for fear that Madame Bastide might

compromise herself by trying to defend him. "Very well," said he, "I am ready to accompany you. Where are you going to take me?"

"First, to the prefecture of police, where you will be identified by some one who knows you well."

"I know who it is, and I also know that I have been denounced by a woman—the one you just left in the cab there. I hope you will not attempt to make me enter it with her. I would be chopped to pieces, rather than endure the company of that creature!"

"That will not be necessary. There is another cab waiting on the boulevard—a cab in which there is room for me, for you, and for the person who is with you."

"You have no warrant for the arrest of this lady, I suppose, and you surely won't arrest her merely because you find her in my company. I just met her in the street, and I don't even know her name."

"But I must know it, and I am sure she will tell it me. Now, madame, please state how you happen to be in this gentleman's company, and explain matters quickly, for I have no time to lose."

Madame Bastide's only response was to draw from her pocket a small packet of papers which she handed to the commissary. He shrugged his shoulders as he took them; but he had scarcely given them a glance, than his expression changed. "Is it really to you that this official letter is addressed?" he inquired, pointing to one document.

"You will not doubt it if you will take the trouble to examine my marriage-certificate, and the copy of the record of my husband's death."

"These documents seem authentic. Where are you staying?"

"In the Rue des Abbesses, at a boarding-house kept by Madame Gouverneur."

"And you came to Paris to secure a pension from the government?"

"Which has been refused, as you see. The letter of the Minister of the Interior is very explicit, it seems to me."

"So you are the widow of—"

"Of Monsieur Angelo Santelli, Commissary-General for the Central and South Western Departments."

Chancelade started with intense surprise. He now understood why the spurious Madame Bastide had made him declare upon oath that he had not killed the commissary. "If you wish to satisfy yourself that I am telling you the truth, sir," continued the widow, "you have only to take me before the secretary-general, who granted me an audience on the day before yesterday. He will identify me. You can also make inquiries at Bordeaux. I bear my mother's name, but many residents of that city know the story of my marriage and its consequences. I had been legally separated from Monsieur Santelli for several years—"

"But that does not explain why I find you in the company of his murderer," interrupted the commissary, gazing searchingly at the widow.

She bore the look unflinchingly, but Chancelade exclaimed, impetuously: "I forbid you to call me a murderer."

Hearing his threatening voice, the police agents drew near with the evident intention of preventing any violent conduct, but their superior checked them with a gesture. "I met Monsieur Chancelade for the first time yesterday, sir," now resumed the young widow. "On my way to Paris I made the acquaintance of his sister, and I was with her when I met him. It was she who sent me to his house to-day, not daring to come herself. She told me that her brother was wanted for having taken part

in one of the recent insurrections. I was not aware that he was accused of a criminal offence—unjustly accused, I am sure. It was he who first informed me of the fact, protesting against the injustice of the charge.”

“It is not enough for him to protest. He was absconding when my subordinates intercepted him. You were with him. Where were you going?”

“He was going away, it is true. He expected to be denounced by a woman, and he was not mistaken, as she brought you here. I was taking him to his sister, who lives in the same house as myself. If you wish to satisfy yourself of this fact, send one of your subordinates home with me.”

All this was said so frankly and energetically, that the commissary felt obliged to reflect a little before taking any decisive steps. He, as well as all his other colleagues, had long been ordered to keep a look-out for Chancelade, and upon receiving Coralie's information, he had immediately taken measures to arrest him. But there was nothing to prove that Chancelade had an accomplice, and Madame Santelli had not figured in the affair; consequently, he did not feel justified in arresting her merely because he had found her in the company of the accused. His duty consisted in ascertaining whether she really lived at the Rue des Abbesses, and in having her closely watched until further orders. “So be it!” said he, “one of my men shall accompany you home; but go at once, and hold yourself in readiness to appear before the investigating magistrate. As for you,” he added, turning to Chancelade, and pointing to the end of the street, “just walk on.”

The widow silently extended her hand to Louis, who dared not press a kiss upon it, though he was dying to do so, and then stepped aside. The commissary called one of his subordinates, gave him some brief instructions in a low tone, and told the three others to surround Chancelade, who was quite ready to move on. He now knew that the beautiful widow was not indifferent to him, and he felt strong in his innocence. So what did it matter if he were sent back to prison? Something told him that he would be released sooner or later, completely vindicated. He only felt anxious about his sister and her friend. It did not seem to him at all probable that Coralie had denounced Jacques, so he might reasonably hope that his friend would learn the state of affairs from Edmée, and finally succeed in getting out of the scrape. Besides, he had not the time to reflect about his friends' prospects, for, on passing Doradour's house, he saw Coralie looking out of the cab window, and perceived that she was weeping.

“They are carrying you away!” she cried, wildly. “and it was I who betrayed you! Forgive me—pray, pray forgive me.”

“Back!” replied Chancelade, giving her a look of scorn. “Hide yourself, or I shall spit in your face!” The wretched woman drew back as she was bidden, and Chancelade passed her with his face averted.

The commissary, who overheard this exchange of remarks, now fully understood what he had partially guessed before. Coralie had rushed into his office with her features distorted by passion, and had declared that M. Santelli's murderer was hiding in a house near by. He had a great deal of difficulty in eliciting any definite information as regards herself and the motives that impelled her to denounce this murderer, but he had strongly suspected that he had to deal with a jealous woman thirsting for revenge; and, at all events, as the information she had imparted was important, he had decided to act upon it without delay.

Coralie asked permission to accompany him, and he made no objection,

for he was anxious to punish her if her information proved false, as might be the case. She herself was so enraged, that she had entirely lost the power to reason, and she would gladly have strangled Chancelade and her supposed rival with her own hands. However, when her excitement subsided, which it did right speedily by reason of its very violence, she began to repent of what she had done ; but, unfortunately, it was too late, and before she reached Doradour's house, the commissary had dispatched his subordinates in pursuit of Louis and his companion. Coralie did not dare to leave the cab, but witnessed the arrest from a distance, without understanding why the commissary had such a long conversation with the lady. Then she saw the lady walk away, and Chancelade start to ward the boulevards, escorted by the commissary and three policemen in plain clothes. At this sight her heart failed her ; she burst into tears, and implored Chancelade to forgive her as he passed, but, in lieu thereof, he gave her a scornful reply.

Half-frantic with despair, she sprang from the cab with the intention of following him, but the commissary, who perceived her intention, hastily retraced his steps, and said to her drily : "The man you denounced has been arrested. You ought to be well satisfied."

"I told a falsehood. I accused him unjustly, because I was jealous. Arrest me, if you like, for swearing falsely ; but don't take him to prison."

"Enough ! You will be heard as a witness, but at present I have nothing further to do with you. Re-enter that cab, it will take you home, the driver is already paid," and thereupon, with an imperious gesture, the commissary dismissed her.

Coralie saw that there was no hope, and stopped short. Chancelade had already reached the end of the street, and the official quickened his pace to overtake him. In a moment she saw them disappear round the corner of the boulevard, where another cab was waiting. The one in front of Doradour's house was now going off, as she showed no sign of wishing to avail herself of it.

"He hates me ! he despises me !" she murmured ; "and I shall never see him again. And it is I who have sent him to his death ! What I have done is infamous ! Oh ! that woman, she is the cause of it all. When I saw her, I lost my senses ! And they didn't arrest her. She has gone quietly away, while they are dragging him to prison ! What can she have said to the commissary to induce him to let her go free ? What could have taken her to Louis' house ? Who is she ? I never saw her before. She was in mourning. She certainly did not come from Salviac. She is not at all like a provincial, either in looks or in bearing. What if she should be a friend of his sister ? But his sister has no friends in Paris."

Coralie suddenly recollected that this mysterious stranger had walked up the street, and that a police-agent had followed her at a distance. In which direction had she gone after turning the corner ? Mademoiselle Bernache had not noticed that, but she fancied that the woman in mourning had gone towards the top of the hill, and the idea of trying to overtake her occurred to her mind. "I am not afraid of her," she said to herself. "I shall speak to her very plainly. She will have to explain matters, and when I know whom I have to deal with, I will propose uniting in an attempt to save Louis." Thereupon, without further reflection, Coralie started off on this wild-goose chase. She reached the steps (at the foot of which Louis and Madame Santelli had previously paused), darted up, and soon found herself on a little square in front of the Montmartre municipal

offices. A few shabbily-dressed men sat on some benches round about, smoking their pipes, but she did not dare to ask them if they had seen a lady in mourning go by; and realising at last that she had quite missed the strange woman, she was about to retrace her steps when she saw Jacques approaching.

Warned by Chancelade's significant gesture, Jacques had taken good care not to descend the steps, but he had not gone far off. When he perceived Coralie, he did not hesitate to question her about what had happened. They had not met since the night of the masquerade ball, but Chancelade had told Jacques of his adventure with Coralie, and Jacques had no difficulty in divining that she had just paid Louis a visit. "Well?" he said, inquiringly.

"He has been arrested," replied Mademoiselle Bernache.

"Arrested! Why, I saw him not ten minutes ago."

"He was with a lady, was he not?"

"Yes. It is true, though, that I also saw two men who seemed to be watching him—two detectives, probably, for he made me a sign to run off!"

"There were two other officers lying in wait for him, and also a commissary of police. They have taken him to prison."

"Some one must have betrayed him then. Who could have done so? That woman, perhaps."

"You do not know her, then?"

"I looked at her sharply, and I have pretty good eyes; but I am sure that I never saw her before. Was she also arrested?"

"No; a police-agent followed her, but she is free. I wanted to find her again, but I have failed to do so."

"Well, what good would it do you if you did overtake her? She would not help us to set Chancelade free."

"Set him free! You certainly can't hope to effect that."

"Oh! I never despair; besides, they can't convict an innocent man."

"Then you are sure that it wasn't he who killed the commissary?"

"I was with him two leagues away from Salviac on the evening the murder was committed—by whom, I am unfortunately not able to say."

"I know, however."

"You know? and yet you haven't denounced the murderer, although you were there when they arrested Louis?"

"The commissary of police wouldn't have believed me. I had no proofs; but I shall have some to-morrow."

"Explain yourself more clearly, if you please," said Jacques, "and begin by telling me the name of the murderer."

"The murderer was Monsieur de Mussidan, who left the prison at night-time, whenever he chose—thanks to the kindness of Madame Marteau, the jailer's wife; and I'll make her own it!"

"Dear me! It may be as you say, though it's very strange. But how will you make this Madame Marteau speak out?"

"That is my secret. Only tell me where I can see you again?"

"I don't know. I sha'n't return to the house where I have been staying with Chancelade, at all events. I may decide to return to Périgord." Jacques did not mean a word of this, however, for he intended to go and consult Edmée that very evening.

"Well, as long as you stay in Paris, there is nothing to prevent you from coming to see me to my house. You have been there once already;



and now that the police have your friend in custody, they won't trouble themselves about you."

"All right," said Jacques; "I will go and see you."

"That is all I ask. Now we must part. I have given up all idea of finding the woman I was after when I met you. I can now only think of saving Louis, and save him I will or perish in the attempt."

## XI.

Now that the jailer's pretty wife was established in Paris, in a delightful suite of rooms, on the second floor of a house in the Rue de l'Arcade, near the Madeleine, with a cook and a maid to wait on her, and a brougham at her disposal, she certainly did not regret having parted from her husband. Thanks to General de Plancoët's generosity, she had no more housekeeping cares to attend to; there were no more disconsolate-looking prisoners and morose keepers passing to and fro under her eyes; no more growling to listen to from Pierre Marteau, who, as a rule, was in a bad humour five days out of seven. She was well rid of her husband. She went about when and where she liked, without exposing herself to the unpleasant gossip of petty townsfolk. She promenaded the boulevards, drove through the Bois, and patronised the theatres to her heart's content. Thus circumstanced, Madame Marteau, as she had no principles left her, ought to have been perfectly happy, and yet one thing was wanting.

She had confidently expected to renew her intrigue with M. de Mussidan, in Paris, and to her great surprise the baron now gave her the cold shoulder. The first opportunity of communicating with him had occurred at the masquerade ball, to which she had persuaded the general to take her. Adhémard had entered the general's box, in company with M. de Sigoulès, and had remained there half-an-hour, Aurélie managing not only to exchange a few words with him, but to slip a short note, which she had previously prepared into his hand, unobserved. In this missive she begged of him to call upon her, but to her great surprise the invitation had not been accepted. Indeed, Adhémard had not even taken the trouble to apologise by letter, and his silence could only be interpreted as a mark of disdain.

This cavalier treatment greatly offended the fair Aurélie, who, in her disappointment, began to think of revenge. This was the first time that a man had ever ventured to scorn her, and of all the men she had known, M. de Mussidan was the most deeply indebted to her.

She was in an angry frame of mind when, on the third day after the ball, just as she thought of taking a drive in the Champs Elysées, her maid informed her that a lady, who declined to give her name, wished to speak to her on important business. Although Aurélie was not in the habit of receiving strangers, she had a presentiment that she might not regret departing from her rules on this occasion, so she gave orders to admit the visitor, and had some difficulty in recognising Coralie Bernache, so greatly had the latter changed since her trying experience of the day before.

Madame Marteau expected nothing good from this unexpected call, but she did not allow it to appear. "May I inquire to what I am indebted for your visit?" she began, in a formal manner.

Whereupon Coralie replied: "You are angry with me, I see. You are wrong, my dear, and you must grant me a hearing. Afterwards, you can turn me out-of-doors, if you choose."

"What do you wish me to tell you?" inquired Madame Marteau, without departing from the formal manner she had thought proper to assume.

"Chancelade has been arrested," replied Coralie.

"Chancelade ! and who is Chancelade ?"

"Don't feign ignorance. You must remember what occurred at the Salviac prison, and you know perfectly well who I mean. What is the use of putting on airs with me ? I did not come here as an enemy. I came to ask you to do me a service, and to render you one in return."

"You are rather late about it. It is a long time since I returned to Paris, and if you had really desired to see me—"

"I was afraid you would not admit me. You treated me so badly at Salviac ; and, besides, it was only yesterday that Chancelade was arrested. He succeeded in reaching Paris, after passing through any number of dangers. I have seen him since, and I love him." Madame Marteau listened in silence, secretly wondering if her old friend had not lost her senses. "Ycs, I love him," continued Coralie. "I thought that what I felt for him was only a fleeting fancy ; but I have discovered my mistake too late, alas !"

"That is unfortunate," sneered Aurélie, "but don't worry. I know you ; you will soon get over it."

"Never ! He is in prison accused of murder, and he will be condemned."

"Well, how can I help that ?"

"I want you to assist me in proving his innocence."

"I ! You must be crazy, my dear !"

"Listen. You also were in love with a prisoner at Salviac, and you love him still, I know it."

"You are very much mistaken. I have nothing whatever to do with Monsieur de Mussidan."

"Then why did you slip a note into his hand the other night at the opera ball, in your general's box ?"

Madame Marteau started, and looked searchingly at Coralie, wondering how she could have gained so much information. "Were you at the ball, then ?" she asked, coldly.

"Yes ; in the box opposite yours."

"And from there you saw me give Monsieur de Mussidan a note ? You must have remarkable eyes."

"I saw nothing. I heard Monsieur de Sigoulès reproach his cousin for taking your note, under the very eyes of Monsieur de Plancoët, to whom he is indebted for his pardon."

"Where did you hear this, pray ?"

"In the lounge, where the gentlemen went on leaving your box. I followed them."

"You are playing the spy now, it would seem."

"No ; it is your husband who plays the spy. He was there rigged out in a domino, but it wasn't you he was watching. He had learned, I don't know how, that I had made an appointment to meet Chancelade there. He recognised me by my voice, and after that, he followed me persistently ; and I warned Monsieur de Mussidan, who was talking too loud, that Marteau was close upon our heels. But shall I tell you what I heard Mussidan say to Sigoulès before I did that ?" and as Madame Marteau remained silent, Coralie continued : "He told his cousin that it was no fault of his if you had used his hand as a letter-box, for he was firmly resolved never to see

you again." Aurélie turned pale, for the shaft had struck home. "I don't tell you this to pain you," continued Coralie. "I only want you to know what you have to expect from this handsome young man, who is so much indebted to you. He has become our common enemy, and we ought to join against him. Not only does he scorn you and turn you to ridicule, but he is also the cause of all my poor Chancelade's misfortunes."

"Why, Chancelade owes his escape to the baron."

"Yes; Monsieur de Mussidan helped him to escape because he felt confident that he himself would be pardoned, and that Chancelade's flight would make people even more confident of his guilt; so now that he is in custody, he will be convicted, if I don't prevent it."

"I should like to know how you will do that."

"By handing the real culprit over to them."

"You know the real culprit, then?"

"Yes, and so do you. It is Adhémar de Mussidan."

"That is really too absurd. Why, Adhémar was in prison at the time!"

"But he left the prison at night-time whenever he pleased?"

"He only left it once."

"And on the very night when the commissary was killed."

"Well, what if he did?"

"That fact alone would suffice to make people accuse him."

"Nonsense! Why should he have killed Santelli? He did not even know him."

"We are by no means sure of that. I feel satisfied that we should find there had been something between them, if we looked into the matter, in former years—something about a woman, no doubt."

"No one will believe it. The commissary was at least twenty years older than Monsieur de Mussidan. They could certainly never have been rivals. Besides no one knows, and no one ever will know, that Monsieur de Mussidan spent several hours outside the prison that night."

"No one will know unless you tell them."

"And do you imagine I shall do anything as senseless as that?"

"Well, if you don't, I may."

"No one will believe you, if you do."

"I told your husband, and he believed me."

"You told my husband, and dare to boast of it to me?"

"I am not boasting of it, and it is only for your own good that I am making you acquainted with the situation; besides, Marteau seemed to take the news very well."

"That's false, I am sure. He is the very man to kill me if he convicted me of the slightest infidelity."

"Nonsense! He wouldn't put up with the general's attentions if he were as jealous as all that. I'll admit, though, that he did make a wry face when I spoke to him; but all his anger was directed against Adhémar. He did not say a word about you."

"You don't know him. Chancelade's escape cost Monsieur Marteau his place, and he will have his revenge."

"Upon Adhémar—yes."

"And upon me as well. You have acted infamously. What did I ever do to you that you should betray me so basely?"

"Why, my dear, I was only thinking of saving Chancelade. Your hus-

band was charged with arresting my lover, so the idea of putting him upon another scent occurred to me, and I succeeded in doing so."

"That can't be, since Chancelade has been arrested."

"But it wasn't Marteau who arrested him. Marteau at present only thinks of establishing Monsieur de Mussidan's guilt."

"But to do that he will be obliged to denounce me as well."

"That consideration won't deter him."

"Then I am lost, and you coolly come here to inform me of it! Come, confess the truth! You have an object in all this."

"I just told you that my object was to save Chancelade, and to save him without ruining you."

"I should like to know how you propose to accomplish that?" said Aurélie, who had now become greatly agitated.

"I need not say that you were in love with Adhémar. It is only necessary for us to unite in the statement that he begged you to allow him to leave the prison, solemnly promising to return, and that you were weak and foolish enough to yield to his entreaties; and that even after the event, you had no suspicion that it was he who had shot the commissary. If you are asked how you happened to make the acquaintance of one of your husband's prisoners, you can say that his window was opposite yours, and that you communicated with each other by signs. You can add that your share in the matter was confined to opening the door of his cell, and the window of one of your rooms that overlooked the street; and if the magistrate wishes to know why you now reveal facts that you have so far kept secret, you can tell him that, having just heard of Chancelade's recent arrest, you are afraid that an innocent man will be condemned, and so you have resolved not to conceal the truth any longer. Who will contradict you? Certainly not Marteau. He will rather sustain you, for even if he believes that you have deceived him, he won't care to let everybody know it."

Aurélie listened to her friend's arguments with bowed head. She admitted their weight, but she was not wholly convinced, and her face betrayed the feelings that agitated her. She could not forgive Coralie for placing her in such a dangerous position by betraying the secret she had discovered, but she was obliged to admit that her advice might be worth following. The statement Coralie had improvised seemed plausible, and Madame Marteau might reasonably hope that her husband, the general, and the authorities would be satisfied with it. After all she would seem to be playing a creditable part, sacrificing herself to save an innocent person. Besides, she did not believe in Adhémar's guilt. She was persuaded that he would vindicate himself by proving that he had merely left the prison to destroy some lists of insurgents, and other compromising papers. This was the explanation he had previously given her at Salviac, and she had believed him. Others also might believe him, and M. de Mussidan would probably escape at the cost of some annoyance, and a detention of some little duration. This was exactly what Aurélie desired. Her longing for revenge did not carry her so far as to wish for her whilom admirer's death. Milder retribution would satisfy her, and she felt that Adhémar would be sufficiently punished if she could succeed in again casting him into jail. Still, much as Aurélie tried to persuade herself, she was not after all so sure that he would be released; the stakes in this dangerous game might be the life of a man she had loved, and whom she still loved, perhaps. So she hesitated, and Coralie, perceiving it, resorted to falsehood to decide her. "I see it costs you a struggle to denounce Adhémar," she continued gently;

"and if he had merely deserted you, I could understand your hesitation ; but you can't know how shamefully the heartless coxcomb has talked about you."

"What has he said ?" asked Madame Marteau, eagerly.

"I did not at first repeat all that I heard him say in the lounge, while I was following him, for I did not want to cause you unnecessary grief ; but as you still appear to cherish some illusions about the scoundrel, I will tell you that I heard him talk about you to the count in the most insulting terms. He said that his intrigue with you had enabled him to while away the time while he was in prison, but that you were quite beneath his notice now that he was free again."

"That was really too bad !" muttered Madame Marteau.

"He even went so far as to say that your beautiful fair hair was carroty, and that you had frightfully ugly hands. That was absurd of course, and if he had known that I was listening, he would have sung a very different song, for he knows perfectly well that he is at your mercy. But he fancied himself alone with Monsieur de Sigoulès, and so he spoke openly. Fortunately, I was there. Ah ! I have no patience with myself when I think that I was fool enough to warn him that your husband was watching him. I ought to have let Marteau hear his tattle. However, you know all now, and I hope you will make the baron pay dearly for his treachery."

"Yes ; he shall pay for it. You may be assured of that," said Madame Marteau, in a husky voice.

"Then you will go with me to the commissary of police ?" asked Coralie, eagerly.

"What commissary of police ?"

"The one who arrested Chancelade."

"And what should I say to this commissary ?"

"Why tell him that, hearing of Chancelade's arrest, you feel it your duty to inform him of what occurred in the Salviac prison."

"But he will ask me my name."

"Of course ; and you will have to give it, and explain your position to him. He will understand that it is a very delicate case, and he probably won't think it advisable to drag Pierre Marteau into the matter. He will take your evidence, and report it to the proper authorities, and then the public prosecutor will at once issue a warrant for Monsieur de Mussidan's arrest."

"And after that ?"

"Well, after that you will be summoned before an examining magistrate, to whom you will repeat your story. Then one of two things will happen : either that rascal Adhémar will be sent before the assizes, and you will be summoned as a witness against him, or else Adhémar will secure a dismissal of the charge. But in either case, he will have to spend several weeks in prison, and won't emerge spotless by any means, for an accusation like that always clings to a man. His reputation will have greatly suffered and he won't dare to show himself anywhere, for all the people of his set would snub him unmercifully."

"That is exactly what I should like," murmured Aurélie.

"Ah ! I understand. You can't forget that you were once deeply in love with him, so you wouldn't like to see him beheaded, though you wouldn't be sorry to give him a severe lesson. Well, you needn't hesitate ; he has some very influential friends, and he will be defended by the best lawyers in Paris. He will come out of it all right, eventually, but you will be amply

avenged. However, we must waste no more time here. I know where to find the office of the commissary who arrested Chancelade, and I will take you there. It is at Montmartre. Your brougham is waiting for you outside, and in ten minutes we shall be there."

Aurélié's brougham was waiting outside, as Mademoiselle Bernache said, and Aurélié herself was dressed to go out; but she did not seem to be in any hurry to reply to the pressing invitation of her friend, who, seeing her hesitation, exclaimed: "What! you still hesitate, after all I have just told you? What are you made of, that you can tamely submit to such insults? You used not to be such a coward a few years ago; a lover who treated you so shamefully, would have fared badly. You would never have forgiven him."

"I have not forgiven Monsieur de Mussidan, but I should prefer to have my revenge in a different way. I should be better pleased if I could compel him to leave the country."

"By threatening to denounce him. But he would only laugh at your threats; and if even he yielded to them, Chancelade would be no better off. The flight of the real culprit wouldn't prove Chancelade's innocence."

"Yes; for I should require Monsieur de Mussidan to sign before starting, a written confession admitting that he was Monsieur Santelli's murderer."

"That would amount to little or nothing. Every one would believe that he merely wrote it to vindicate Chancelade. Besides, he would refuse to make such a statement."

"If he refused, I should go straight to the police."

"Yes; and Monsieur de Mussidan being warned, would lose no time in making his escape. Besides, if you saw him again, you would not keep your word. You love him still, in spite of all you say, and he has so much influence over you, that you would not be able to summon up sufficient courage to denounce him."

"I do not think that he would be able to dissuade me; but I sha'n't give him a chance. I sha'n't go to see Adhémar, but his relative, the Count de Sigoulès. I shall request him to communicate my conditions to Monsieur de Mussidan, and ask him to give me an answer to-morrow. I shall merely grant him a respite of twenty-four hours."

This was not what Coralie exactly desired, but it was something, and really more than she had expected to obtain from Madame Marteau at the beginning of their conversation. "Will you allow me to be present at your interview with this Sigoulès?" she asked.

"No," replied Aurélié, decidedly; "your presence would not be of the slightest advantage to me—quite the contrary; in fact, Monsieur de Sigoulès would never forgive me for accusing his cousin of murder in another person's presence. I shall start at once. I know that Monsieur de Sigoulès is staying at the Hôtel du Helder. He told the general so the other night."

"Well, although you refuse to let me accompany you, you must, at least, promise that you will lose no time in informing me of the result of the interview. I shall go straight home and wait for you there."

"I will call to see you before night; but, on your side, you must promise me not to take any further steps in the matter until you have seen me again. I am willing to do all I can to help your friend Chancelade, but I must be allowed to act in my own way."

"You are right," replied Coralie, "and you need not fear my doing any-

thing without your knowledge. I should be too much afraid of spoiling your plans, unintentionally."

"Then we will say good-bye for the present. You still live in the Rue Mogador, I suppose?"

"Yes; and I shall not stir from home to-day."

"Try to be alone when I come."

"You may depend upon that; it won't cost me much of a sacrifice, I assure you, to remain alone. I haven't the heart to entertain visitors since poor Chancelade was taken to prison. Clara Lasource called yesterday and I sent word that I was ill."

"Wasn't Monsieur de Mussidan connected with her at one time?"

"Yes; and she is quite ready to renew her intrigue with him. In fact, she may have done so already," added Coralie, in order to make her friend still more jealous.

"Well, it will have to be undone," muttered Madame Marteau, savagely.

"Have you seen the sub-prefect, Vignory, since your return?"

"Yes! He was at the opera ball quite tipsy, but did not recognise me under my mask. He had not better call on me. If he does, I shall shut the door in his face."

"I understand that. He would make your Russian prince quarrel with you."

"Oh! I don't care a fig for the prince. I infinitely prefer Chancelade."

"Are you as far gone as that?"

"Yes; I am desperately in love with him, and if you will help me to set him free, you will find me ready to go through fire and water for you."

"I am not so as exacting as that, but I must be off. If we continue chatting I may miss Monsieur de Sigoulès."

"Let me kiss you before I go," said Mademoiselle Bernache.

Madame Marteau offered her cheek with a tolerably good grace, Coralie imprinted a hearty kiss upon it, and then darted off.

Women's quarrels do not generally last very long, and this reconciliation, being founded on mutual interest, was tolerably sincere. Coralie could only hope to repair her disastrous step of the day before, by Madame Marteau's assistance, and Madame Marteau, having been denounced to her husband, could only get out of the scrape by following Coralie's advice. Through the medium of M. de Sigoulès, she hoped to extort a sort of certificate of good character from Adhémair before he fled from the country to escape from a more or less well-founded charge; and this interested her much more than any desire to prove Louis Chancelade's innocence. Accordingly, five minutes after Coralie's departure, she stepped into her brougham, which rapidly conveyed her to the Hôtel du Helder. The porter told her that M. de Sigoulès was in his rooms and alone. She went upstairs, tapped at the count's door, and hearing a summons to walk in, she entered a small sitting room where the count was smoking his pipe by the fire side. He sprung up with alacrity on seeing a lady, and as soon as Aurélie raised her veil, he recognised her and frowned. Moreover, he evinced no eagerness to offer her a chair, and Madame Marteau realised that she must straightway broach the subject that had brought her there.

"Monsieur le Comte," said she, "you must excuse me for presenting myself here without your permission. I should not have taken this liberty, if I had not been positively obliged to speak to you on matters of great importance."

"Have you quarrelled with the general?" asked M. de Sigoulès. "If so, I can't take upon myself to patch up a reconciliation."

"It isn't that—a man's life and honour are at stake."

"Indeed!" responded the old nobleman, with a rather incredulous smile.

"Yes, and as we may be interrupted at any moment, I should be greatly obliged to you if you would lock the door."

Marvelling greatly at this request, but unable to find any good excuse for a refusal, the count did as he was bid. "Now, madame," he said politely but coldly, "will you have the kindness to sit down and explain as briefly as possible what has brought you here? I am expecting visitors, and have very little time at my disposal."

Aurélié took a chair, and as M. de Sigoulès seated himself on the opposite side of the fire-place, she resumed: "You are probably aware of the feelings that once existed between Monsieur de Mussidan and myself."

"Yes, madame. My cousin told me about what took place in the prison where your husband was chief-warder. He did very wrong—"

"He certainly might have been silent. Still, I don't complain of his indiscretion, as he chose you for a confidant. My secret is in good hands, and I feel sure that you will not betray it. You also know that I did not see Monsieur de Mussidan after his return to Paris, until I met him the other night at the Opera House ball. You may have even noticed that I handed him a letter there."

"Yes, madame; and you must allow me to say that I think Adhémar acted very wisely in not replying to it."

"Do you likewise approve of the disparaging remarks he has made about me?"

"What disparaging remarks?"

"He told you in the lounge that he had had enough of me, and he was tired of me. He even went so far as to say that I wasn't at all pretty."

"I heard nothing of the kind. The person who was following us must have misrepresented the facts. Adhémar merely declared that he had resolved not to resume his intrigue with you."

"And you think he acts rightly?"

"Quite so, especially as he owes his liberty to the influence of the Marquis de Plancoët."

"He might have left me more politely."

"Excuse me, madame" said the count, impatiently, "I am no fit judge of the grievances you may have against my relative, and if there is nothing else you wish to speak to me about—"

"I shouldn't have taken the trouble to come here about such a trifle as that," interrupted Madame Marteau. "No, I do not come to complain of Monsieur de Mussidan; I come to warn you of a danger that is now threatening him, and to enable you to save him if there still be time."

"Save him from what?"

"From disgrace, and very possibly from death."

"What is the meaning of this unseemly jest?"

"I am not jesting. He is about to be charged with the murder of Monsieur Santelli, the commissary general."

"One might as well accuse him of having stolen the towers of Notre Dame. But who intends to bring this charge against him? Is it you?"

"No, sir. I have a better memory than he has. I can't forget that I once loved him, and the step I now take is proof that I don't wish him



harm. Monsieur de Mussidan will soon be denounced by a woman who is not, and who never has been, in love with him, but who is attached to Louis Chancelade. Do you begin to understand the situation ? ”

“ Not in the least. ”

“ It is very plain, however. If this Chancelade had not succeeded in making his escape from the Salviac prison, he would probably have been tried and convicted as the commissary's murderer. ”

“ For my own part, I am perfectly satisfied that he is not guilty. Besides, he is out of reach. He has crossed the frontier before now. ”

“ You are very much mistaken, sir ; and if you take an interest in his sister, as I think you do, you can inform her that he was arrested yesterday at Montmartre. ”

“ How do you know that ? ” inquired the old nobleman, giving Aurélie a suspicious glance.

“ The woman who is so much in love with him just told me so. You know her. You saw her drive into Salviac. She met Chancelade there, while she was staying with me at the prison, and she assisted him in making his escape. She has also met him since her return to Paris, and as she is positively smitten with him, she has sworn to prove that it was not he who killed Monsieur Santelli. ”

“ And she means to charge Adhémar with the crime ? Really I have never heard such an absurd story. So this creature hopes to persuade the judges that Monsieur de Mussidan had wings, and that he flew through the bars of his dungeon window. ”

“ No ; she will simply prove that the doors of the prison were opened for him—that they were opened for him on the night of the murder. ”

On hearing this, M. de Sigoulès started up in his arm-chair, and looked searchingly at Madame Martean. “ Who opened them for him ? You must know, as you were there. ”

“ I did, ” replied Aurélie, without the slightest hesitation.

“ You ? And why ? ”

“ Because he asked me, and I hadn't the heart to refuse him. I frequently visited him in his cell. One evening he implored me to let him leave the prison for a short time on the following night—I had just informed him of the commissary's arrival—and he swore that he would return before midnight, and he kept his word. ”

“ He must have told you his reasons for making this excursion. ”

“ He told me that he wished to destroy some papers which he had concealed near the club-house—papers implicating certain parties in the December rising. ”

“ What he told you was the truth, ” exclaimed the count, slightly reassured. “ I am positive of that. Adhémar never told a falsehood in his life. ”

“ I thought he was telling the truth, of course, or I should not have yielded. ”

“ And why are you no longer of that opinion ? ”

“ Because I have since learned many things of which I was then ignorant. Monsieur Santelli was killed at about eleven o'clock. Your cousin returned to the prison twenty minutes afterwards, and he had left it at half-past ten. This fact alone, if it became known, would be enough to ruin him ; and I should have suspected that he had committed the crime if Chancelade had not been arrested and brought to the prison that same night. I then thought, like everyone else, that it was your tenant's son who had fired the

fatal shot. He had his father's wrongs to avenge, and he was found with a gun in his hand. Now, however, I am satisfied of his innocence, and so are you, for you just told me so."

"Still, that is no reason that my cousin should be guilty. The commissary had any number of enemies, and Adhémar did not even know him."

"You are by no means certain of that, nor am I; but we are not his judges. The question I ask is this: If I tell the prefect of police that Monsieur de Mussidan was outside the prison at the time when Monsieur Santelli was shot, do you think that Monsieur de Mussidan would be left at liberty?"

"Suspicion might fall upon him, but I feel sure that he would be able to establish his innocence beyond any possible doubt."

"Well, I doubt it very much."

"Besides, you cannot denounce him. It would cost you too much."

"Why? I shall admit, of course, that I did very wrong to yield to the baron's entreaties; but General de Plancoët's and my husband's anger would be turned against Monsieur de Mussidan, not against me. You see that I really have nothing to fear."

"But if Adhémar were arrested, you would certainly be regarded as his accomplice."

"By no means. I should be taken for an infatuated woman who could not resist the entreaties of the man she loved. But you may be at ease upon one point, I shall not denounce Monsieur de Mussidan."

"Then who will?"

"Who? Why Coralie Bernache, who will denounce him to save her lover."

"Then you told her, I suppose, that Adhémar left the prison at night."

"How could I conceal the fact from her? She was my guest, and of course, perceived the situation of affairs. I could not visit your cousin's cell without her knowledge, and on the night when Chancelade escaped, Coralie saw Monsieur de Mussidan, and talked with him. He told you what occurred that night, and how Chancelade's escape was managed, I suppose?"

"He gave me none of the particulars."

"I must tell you, then, that Chancelade owed his escape entirely to your cousin. I felt no interest in him, and did not think of such a thing as facilitating his flight. However, I went to see Adhémar that evening, and while I was with him, I told him that Chancelade had been arrested on a charge of murdering the commissary. Adhémar was very indignant, and requested that Chancelade might be allowed to leave the prison in the same way as he had done. I refused; he insisted; and as I still refused, he went so far as to threaten me that he would accuse himself of Monsieur Santelli's murder. I told him that no one would believe him, whereupon he proceeded to work up the case against himself more cleverly than any public prosecutor could have done. And he refuted all my arguments one after another. For instance, when I called his attention to the fact that he could not have shot the commissary, for the very good reason that he had no gun at his disposal, he replied: 'I shall state where I procured the gun I used.'"

"Did he tell you where he procured it?" inquired M. de Sigoulès, eagerly.

"No; but I am sure he would have done so if I had urged him a little further; however, I took good care not to do so, for fear that he might commit himself irretrievably, and I knew too much already. In a like manner, when I reminded him that he had no just cause of complaint against Monsieur Santelli personally, he hastily replied: 'I will reveal how he wronged me, and why I hated him so bitterly.' Had you been in my place, what would you have thought of that language?"

"I should have thought it very extraordinary."

"Well, I concluded from it that he was the murderer, and that he had determined to deliver himself up rather than allow an innocent man to be condemned. That is certainly what one would naturally suppose, knowing his character."

"Yes," murmured the old nobleman, "that would be very like him; but why didn't he do it?"

"Because it wasn't necessary. Chancelade was set free, and everyone thought that he would succeed in crossing the frontier. Even you believed that he had already done so, and that Mademoiselle Edmée and her brother had nothing more to fear. That being the case, Monsieur de Mussidan had no reason for accusing himself. Unfortunately, the aspect of affairs has changed, since Chancelade has been arrested. If Monsieur de Mussidan remained silent now, Chancelade would probably be convicted. And to prevent that, an unscrupulous person is now on the point of denouncing your cousin. In fact, she is only waiting to learn the result of my interview with you to do so."

"You refer to Mademoiselle Bernache, I suppose?"

"Yes. She has been nearly frantic ever since her lover's arrest, and won't shrink from anything."

"Then I am surprised that she has waited so long."

"It is to me that Monsieur de Mussidan is indebted for this respite. I had no little difficulty, however, in persuading her to grant it, for she intended on leaving my house to go straight to the same commissary of police who arrested her lover."

"A respite!" repeated the old nobleman, bitterly. "You speak as if Monsieur de Mussidan's life and honour were at her mercy."

"Such is, in fact, about the situation. If I don't let her know your answer to-day, she will proceed to act, and the injury she will do your cousin will be irreparable. But there is still time to prevent it."

"My answer! And what answer does she expect from me? Does she expect that I am going to nrite with her in accusing my cousin?"

"No, and she is not even so anxious to have him arrested. Al she cares for is to secure Chancelade's release, and he would be released if Monsieur de Mussidan consented to confess his guilt. It would suffice for him to make a full confession in writing before starting for a foreign land. This document need not be submitted to the authorities until after his departure, or even until you have received news of his safe arrival in America."

"Then it is a sort of bargain that you propose to me?"

"Not to you, but to Monsieur de Mussidan. You will be kind enough to explain the situation to him, and then allow him to decide."

"Is that all?" asked the old nobleman, grimly. "Yes? Well, be kind enough to tell the person who sent you that I shall fulfil no such commission. The accusation with which she threatens my cousin is absurd,

and he will have no trouble in defending himself, if she dares to carry this matter any further. He has already paid too dearly for the service he rendered Chancelade, and as to the latter, I feel much less interest in him since I have heard of his connection with Mademoiselle Bernache."

"So you abandon Adhémar to the fate that surely awaits him?" murmured Madame Marteau, really touched.

"Adhémar has nothing to fear," interrupted M. de Sigoulès, angrily. "You must understand, madame, that no member of our family ever stooped to murder. My cousin has been guilty of nothing wrong, except of trusting you."

Just then the door-knob turned, but as the count had turned the key in the lock, the door did not open. Aurélie sprang up as pale as death. It seemed to her that it must be Adhémar who was trying to enter. There came a loud rap, however, and the count cried out impatiently: "Who is there?"

Although he spoke very loud, no reply came, possibly because the visitor was not prepared for the question, or possibly because he did not wish to give his name. However, a moment later, the rapping began again, this time considerably louder than before. The count repeated his question, raising his voice still higher, but to his great annoyance he repeated it in vain. He did not want to open the door until he knew whom he had to deal with. It was, perhaps, Adhémar who was rapping, or, perhaps, Edmée; and M. de Sigoulès was not disposed to usher either of them into Madame Marteau's presence. Unfortunately, the apartment had but one outlet, so that the old nobleman could not show his fair visitor out by another door; and yet the situation was becoming ridiculous, and must be brought to an end without further delay. "Madame," he said, abruptly, "I have no idea who this visitor is, but I hope you will kindly refrain from speaking to him."

"Your visitor shall not even see me," replied Aurélie, promptly lowering her thick veil.

"And if it proves to be Adhémar, you will go away without speaking to him?" continued the count.

"I am not anxious to speak to him in your presence, so I will go; but I won't promise not to wait for him in the street. He will, no doubt, understand the danger of refusing my proposal better than you do."

"As you please. I can't prevent you from seeing him in his own rooms or elsewhere. It suffices for me that it should not be here."

While these remarks were being exchanged, the knocking had been going on in a most determined manner. "I am about to open the door," continued the count. "Will you be kind enough to retire into the embrasure of that window?"

Madame Marteau complied with this request, placing herself with her back to the door. The count now unlocked the door, and found himself face to face with a perfect stranger: "What do you want?" M. de Sigoulès roared, in a voice of thunder, so great was his exasperation.

"I want to speak to Monsieur de Mussidan," replied the visitor, who looked like a tradesman.

"His rooms are on the third floor."

"I know that very well, sir; but he wasn't there, and I was told that I should probably find him here."

"The person that told you so is a fool; and I think it very strange that you should venture to make such a disturbance at my door. I

have no time to waste, just now, and I must request you to leave me in peace."

"Excuse me, sir, but this is the fifth time that I have called. Monsieur de Mussidan is always absent, so I thought I might as well apply to his uncle."

"I am not his uncle."

"You are, at least, his cousin, or a very near relative, and I should like to show you—"

"I have no time to examine anything. Go to the devil!" exclaimed the count, trying to shut the door in the face of his importunate visitor.

But the stranger was not to be got rid off. He had succeeded in getting a firm hold on the door, and without moving, he said: "Very well, sir. As Monsieur de Mussidan refuses to pay his debts, there is nothing left for me but to put my bill in a lawyer's hands. This will teach me to give credit to the nobility of Périgord again."

"How dare you say that!" cried M. de Sigoulès, now furiously angry.

"I say that the baron is no better than a common swindler, and that I may as well give up all idea of ever seeing my money again. But I shall at least have the pleasure of causing him some annoyance, for I will prosecute him to the end, and maybe I shall charge him with obtaining goods by false pretences."

On hearing this threatening announcement, the count sprung forward, with the evident intention of seizing the insolent creditor by the throat; but he recollected in time that Madame Marteau was present, and he did not want a scene to take place while she was there.

"I ought to send you down-stairs faster than you came up," he now said to the tradesman; "but I don't wish to lower myself by engaging in a quarrel with you; so, though I care nothing about your ridiculous threats, I order you to explain. How much does Monsieur de Mussidan owe you?"

"Fourteen hundred francs, and the interest on that amount for nine months."

"Very well; I understand. You lent him that amount. You are a usurer, I suppose?"

"No, sir; I am a commission merchant, long and honourably known in Paris. I purchased an article in England, in compliance with your nephew's orders, and delivered it to him. He was to pay on delivery. He did not do so, and I was foolish enough to consent to wait; but I have a right to demand interest on the amount at the legal rate, which is six per cent, per annum."

"I am surprised that you waited nine months. You must have been pretty well acquainted with Monsieur de Mussidan and his affairs."

"Yes, sir. Before he became embarrassed financially, I furnished him with several articles of English manufacture, and he paid me promptly as long as his money lasted. When he left Paris, to escape his creditors, he told me that he would pay me when better days came; but at the latter part of last year I learned, through the papers, that he had been arrested and imprisoned on some political charge. Of course, that wasn't the moment for me to present my bill; but quite recently, hearing that he had been set at liberty, and had returned to Paris with one of his near relatives, the Count de Sigoulès, whose heir he is, I thought myself quite justified in presenting my claim."

This was said in a manner which somewhat calmed the old nobleman, especially as the stranger added: "Besides, I do not require the bill to be settled to-day, and if Monsieur le Comte will be kind enough to guarantee,

even verbally, the payment of Monsieur de Mussidan's debt, I will wait as long as he desires."

"I am sure that sounds very fair," growled M. de Sigoulès. "All I can say now, however, is that I will show your bill to my cousin, and that if he acknowledges that he is really your debtor to that amount, you shall be paid."

"That is quite sufficient. The bill is not receipted. I will leave it with you, if you like, and will call again in a few days."

"The deuce take me, if I can imagine what kind of goods you sold to my cousin," growled the count, while Adhémar's creditor was searching his pocket-book for the bill in question. "Monsieur de Mussidan has never engaged in business, and I imagined that he only owed money to his tailor or his horse-dealer."

"I sold him a superb rifle, which I had sent from London at his request. I paid the manufacturer cash for it, and I assure you, sir, that I shall make nothing on the transaction."

"A rifle!" repeated M. de Sigoulès, greatly astonished. "What kind of weapon was it?"

"A rifle of an entirely new kind—a breech-loader of extraordinary range and precision, a masterpiece of Manton's, the famous English gunsmith."

The count involuntarily turned towards Madame Marteau, and saw that she was listening.

"Here is the bill," continued the commission agent, "and here also is the invoice of the London manufacturer. You will notice, count, that the weapon is minutely described, and that the number engraved upon the barrel is indicated. I don't know whether the rifle is still in Monsieur de Mussidan's possession or not, but even if he has disposed of it, it can be identified anywhere by the aid of this description."

M. de Sigoulès glanced hurriedly over the papers, and then said, curtly: "Will you leave them with me until to-morrow?"

"Willingly."

"Very well, then; call again to-morrow at five o'clock. You shall then be paid."

So saying, the old nobleman closed the door upon the commission agent, approached Madame Marteau, and asked, abruptly: "You heard, did you not?"

"Yes, and understood," replied Aurélie, whose eyes were glittering with excitement. "I was at Salviac, you recollect, when the weapon with which Monsieur Santelli was shot, was discovered."

"Well, I ask forty-eight hours to come to an understanding with Monsieur de Mussidan. Your friend will certainly consent to wait that length of time?"

"I will compel her to wait."

"Very well. You shall have my answer on the day after to-morrow. All I can promise you at this moment is that justice shall be done."

"I feel sure of that, and I will go," said Aurélie.

The old nobleman allowed her to leave, and then began to walk excitedly up and down the sitting-room. Overwhelmed with consternation by the discovery he had just made, he vainly endeavoured to decide what course he should pursue, and even thought of blowing out the brains of the relative who would surely bring dishonour upon his name if he were allowed to live. However, he said to himself that he could not condemn him without a hearing. Appearances were certainly against Adhémar, but appear-

ances are not always to be trusted. He could, perhaps, explain why he had purchased this rifle, and tell what he had done with it. Was it really the weapon that had been found in the grounds of the club-house? M. de Sigoulès tried to doubt it, and longed for the arrival of his cousin so as to be able to question him. Adhémar had gone out to try a horse which the count thought of purchasing, and he had promised to return before dinner to make his report. Dinner time was now fast approaching, and the old nobleman nerved himself for the trying interview.

About twenty minutes after Madame Marteau's departure, Adhémar entered the room, his colour heightened by his ride, his eyes sparkling, and a smile upon his lips. "An excellent bargain, my dear cousin," he exclaimed, as he crossed the threshold. "The horse is a trifle older than one might wish, but it is of excellent stock, and will serve your purpose capitally. The owner hunted with the animal all last season, and it is none the worse for it. It has plenty of spirit, and jumps capitally. In fact, it pleases me so well, that I should be delighted to show it off in the Bois until you leave Paris. If the dealer will take a hundred louis for it, you had better buy it."

"That is exactly six hundred francs more than one of Manton's English rifles costs," interrupted the count, with a searching glance at his relative.

"That is what I should call an abrupt transition. What possible connection do you see between a piece of firearms and a horse, which is certainly not lacking in fire, that's true?"

"Cease this jesting, sir, and answer the questions I am about to put to you."

"Good heavens! am I to be subjected to a cross-examination?" exclaimed Adhémar, still smiling.

"Yes. You are in the presence of your natural judge."

"A judge to whose authority I bow. But what am I accused of?"

"A man called here just now, about a debt you contracted last year."

"Is that all? Why, my dear cousin, you can't be ignorant of the fact that I have several creditors. I hope to pay them some day, and I assure you it isn't my fault if this one applied to you. I shall give him a sound thrashing for his impudence, if you will only tell me his name."

"Look at this bill," interrupted M. de Sigoulès, handing the agent's invoice to his relative.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the young fellow, after glancing at it; "so it was that idiot Vogler—a man who sells anything and everything on commission. I have put money enough in his pocket, and I think he might have waited awhile; however, his bill is correct. I do owe him fourteen hundred francs."

"Then you admit that you purchased a rifle through him?"

"Certainly. It was at a time when I had an idea of going shooting lions in Algeria. It would have been a good thing for me if I had persisted in the scheme. But I fell a victim to a lady's bright eyes, and before I regained my liberty, I hadn't money enough left to purchase my outfit."

"What have you done with this rifle?"

Adhémar changed countenance. He was at last beginning to understand the drift of his relative's questions. "Why, I cannot exactly say what has become of it," he stammered. "My furniture was seized and sold—and the rifle, probably went with the rest of the wreck."

"So you are obliged to lie already," said M. de Sigoulès, sternly. "You, a Mussidan, and one of my race?"

"It is the first time anyone has told me that I lied," retorted Adhémar warmly; "and if the insult did not come from you—"

"No blustering, if you please, and answer me without prevaricating. Where is this rifle? I know for a certainty that you kept it, and the falsehood which you have just told is the more inexcusable as you know very well what occurred at Salviac after Louis Chancelade's escape. A rifle made by Manton, the London gunsmith, was found—in my presence, as I told you during the last visit that I paid you in the prison—found, hidden on the grounds of the club-house."

"There is nothing to prove that it was the one that Vogler sold me."

"So you again try to deny the evidence?" said M. de Sigoulès mournfully.

"But you told me yourself that the investigating magistrate attached no importance to this discovery—and the fact of my release is sufficient proof of it."

"You were released at my request—and I almost regret having secured your pardon. You were released because everybody was ignorant of what I now know."

"And what do you know?" inquired Mussidan, who was becoming more and more disturbed.

"I know that on the night when the commissary general was murdered, you left the prison half an hour before the perpetration of the crime, and that you returned there half an hour afterwards. I have been told this by your accomplice—the jailer's pretty wife. She just left here."

"She denounced me, then?"

"She will denounce you to-morrow to the police, if I don't prevent it. I should add that she was present during my interview with the man who sold you this weapon, and that she heard everything. Besides, you yourself had confessed to her that you were the commissary's murderer."

"Never!"

"Is it necessary for me to recall the circumstances under which you made that avowal? She came to tell you that Chancelade was under arrest, charged with killing the commissary. You declared that the young man was innocent, and that she must allow him to escape. As she strongly objected to that, you declared that if she persisted in her refusal, you would accuse yourself. It was a generous impulse, indicating that every spark of honourable feeling was not dead in your breast."

"I pitied the fellow, and I don't repent of what I did, as he owes his liberty to me."

"He was free, but he is free no longer. Madame Marteau just informed me that he was arrested yesterday. Shall you allow him to be condemned?"

"No," was the prompt reply.

"Then you must not shrink from the inevitable. You must surrender yourself."

"Is this Madame Marteau's ultimatum?"

"Yes; she announced it on behalf of a woman who has no reason to spare you, for she loves Louis Chancelade, and has no love for you."

"Aurélié's pretended cousin, eh? Coralie Bernache."

"The same. She gives you forty-eight hours to confess in writing that you fired the fatal shot at Monsieur Santelli. Then you may leave France, and your confession will not be given to the police until you are out of reach. You will be disgraced, but your life will be safe."



"I prefer death to disgrace," replied Adhémar. "But go on. If I refuse, what then?"

"You will be arrested at this woman's instigation, and you will lose both your life and your honour."

"I think not."

"How dare you say so? Does not a political murder dishonour a nobleman?"

"I might present numerous arguments in reply, but I won't contest the point. What would you advise me to do?"

"I advise you to die," replied M. de Sigoulès, sternly,

"That is to say, you advise me to blow my brains out. The advice is very sensible in some respects, and I have no particular objection to following it; but my death would not save Chancelade."

"It will save him if you leave the written confession which is asked of you; and your disgrace will not be reflected upon your family. I myself will take the letter to the magistrate charged with the investigation of Chancelade's case, and I shall ask him to hush up the affair as it will have virtually come to an end by the death of the real culprit. My old comrade, General de Plancoët, will assist me, and between us we shall secure a dismissal of the charge against Chancelade."

"My dear cousin," said Mussidan, who had lost none of his calmness, "you condemn me to death, and I shall not appeal from the sentence you have pronounced upon me; but you must allow me to make a few remarks before the penalty is carried into execution. I should like to ask you, for instance, whether you consider suicide the best remedy for the unfortunate position in which I find myself?"

"I know no other," replied M. de Sigoulès, gravely.

"But you must recollect that it will be equivalent to a confession of guilt if I kill myself. You can hardly hope to deceive any one, for everybody who knows me is well aware that I have no wish to die."

"It strikes me, sir, that you are afraid!" cried the old nobleman, angrily.

"You know better than that; but if I must die, I would rather be killed than die by my own hand."

"Be killed! in Africa? You forget that you are no longer worthy to serve in the French army."

"Oh! I don't mean that! But I have been challenged to fight a duel, and I know that my opponent is an expert swordsman. He will take great pleasure in putting me out of the way. I shall defend myself for awhile; I shall even try to wound him slightly; but finally I shall allow him to kill me, and the world will be well rid of me. I fight to-morrow, and it isn't necessary to say that I shall draw up a statement for Chancelade's benefit before repairing to the duelling ground."

"With whom are you going to fight?" inquired M. de Sigoulès, touched in spite of himself.

"I will tell you in a moment, for I intend to ask you to be one of my seconds."

"I will not consent to act in that capacity until I know how you, a Mussidan, murdered a man, instead of attacking him openly?"

"You wish to know? Very well; I will tell you. Oh, I am not going to plead extenuating circumstances! I am only going to give you a plain statement of the facts, and explain the causes which brought about that unfortunate affair."

"The causes!" repeated M. de Sigoulès, mournfully. "Why, you had never even seen that commissary, and he could not have injured you in any way, for you were arrested nearly two months before he came to Salviac."

"I had known him for seven years—known him as a scoundrel and a coward; for I once struck him in the face publicly, and yet he refused to fight with me."

"Where did all that happen?"

"At Bordeaux. I struck him there, in the park one Sunday, in the presence of more than a hundred persons."

"For what reason?"

"Because he had basely slandered me to a young girl whom I loved, and whom I was about to marry."

"Without my knowledge, then, as I never heard of the affair before?"

"I was about to inform you of my intentions when this scandal occurred, on the eve of the very day when I intended to return to Périgord to consult you."

"And the marriage was abandoned on account of this scandal?"

"Yes, slander, in this case, bore its usual fruits. It was that man who married Jeanne Bastide."

"Bastide! Why, I have heard that name before."

"Yes, Louis Chancelade's sister mentioned it in your presence, and in mine, in this very room. She even had a good deal to say to us about Jeanne."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed M. de Sigoulès. "Why, it must be the young widow who dined at the *table d'hôte* with me, at Montmartre! And you say that she married that fellow Santelli?"

"Yes, and she came to Paris after his death, to ask for a pension, as she was the widow of an official. However, a pension has been refused her."

"And did she live with this man up to the time of his death?"

"No; they separated several years ago. Santelli reduced her to beggary, beat her, and made her life a hell. Do you fancy, now, that I had no cause to hate him?"

"You ought to have killed him at Bordeaux," growled M. de Sigoulès.

"I could not induce him to fight, and at last I finally forgot him."

"And you also ceased to care for the woman you once loved so well?"

"I ceased to care for her when she married; and since she became a widow—"

"You have had no right to think of her. I understand."

"Besides, Edmée hinted to us that Jeanne was greatly struck with her brother, and that her brother was equally pleased with Jeanne," said Adhémar.

"Madame Santelli is, of course, ignorant of the fact that Chancelade is accused of her husband's murder?"

"When she learns that, she will also learn that he was unjustly accused. I am no longer to be considered in the matter. I am no longer in the field; in fact, I no longer exist, and when I am really dead, I hope you won't conceal the truth from her."

The old nobleman could not hear his cousin speak like this without being deeply moved, and tears sprung to his eyes. "Go on," he said, in a voice which was husky with emotion. "Tell me what madness induced you to kill this man whom you had ceased to think about, as you yourself just admitted?"

"I swear that the deed was not premeditated, It was all the merest

chance. It happened in this way : when Madame Marteau visited my cell, she kept me informed about what was going on in Salviac. It was through her that I heard of the arrival of the commissary, and learnt his name. I felt sure that this Santelli was the man I had known at Bordeaux. I knew that he had filled all sorts of positions, and that he had joined the political police, after the revolution of 1848. Aurélie, moreover, told me that his first act on arriving in Salviac had been to send old Chancelade, your tenant, into exile."

"Then you became enraged, and—"

"It was indignation rather than anger. I said to myself : 'It seems to be decreed that I shall always find that scoundrel in my path ;' but I did not think of killing him."

"Then why did you ask that woman to allow you to leave the prison ?"

"I will tell you. On the day when the news of the *coup d'état* reached Salviac, I drew up a list of the peasants upon whom I felt I could depend. I even prepared a plan of campaign. I was full of illusions ; I fancied that we should take Salviac, and march straight upon Paris. It was agreed that the rising should take place in all the villages on the same day, the fourth of December. I remained over night at Salviac and we were to meet at seven o'clock in the morning in the woods of Valade, where I was to assume command. On the evening before that assignation, in order to deceive the officials of Salviac, who seemed to be watching me, I took care to show myself at the club. I even played a rubber with the judge and Monsieur Braconne. Between two games, the idea of concealing the papers I had about me, occurred to me, so that they might not be found if I met with any misfortune. I knew a spot where I had already concealed the English rifle, which I had decided not to take with me finding it too heavy, so I went down into the garden and hid my papers in that hole under some gardening tools. You know the result of the insurrection. I was taken prisoner, and was consequently unable to regain possession either of my papers or my rifle. Of course, I felt very uneasy, for I said to myself that some day or other the gardener would be sure to find my lists. At last I ventured to confide my anxiety to Madame Marteau."

"And succeeded in persuading her to let you leave the prison ?"

"She required a great deal of urging, but she finally conducted me to her apartments, where I leaped down into the street."

"Swear to me that your sole object in going out was to destroy those papers."

"I swear it upon my honour as a gentleman. How could I possibly have known that the commissary would go to the club that evening ? Unfortunately, I met him. I had just slipped into the court-yard in front of the club-house, and was about to make my way into the garden, when I heard footsteps approaching, and, hastily drawing up near the wall, I saw the sub-prefect pass by, talking to Santelli, whom I instantly recognised by his voice as well as by his appearance. He strongly advocated sending every one of the prisoners into exile, and even regretted that they could not all be shot."

"The scoundrel !" murmured M. de Sigoulès.

"It was then that a fierce unreasoning anger seized hold of me," continued the Baron de Mussidan. "All my former hatred surged up again in my heart, and I felt a wild desire to spring at his throat, and strangle him. He passed by, without seeing me, and entered the club with the sub-prefect, who was no better than he was, for he agreed with him in every-

thing. I then darted into the garden, and found my papers and rifle. I intended to tear up the papers, and throw the scraps, together with the rifle, into the Dronne, and I was about to descend the hill, when I turned to see if any one were watching me. Santelli was then standing at one of the windows; the sub-prefect was beside him, and I judged, from Vignory's gestures, that he was calling the commissary's attention to the beauties of the landscape. How can I explain the feeling I experienced at that moment? It seemed as if a huge billow of rage mounted to my brain. My rifle was in my hand; I did not even stop to think whether it was loaded or not, but, levelling it at my unsuspecting enemy, I fired—

"And your bullet pierced Santelli's heart."

"I did not see him fall. The instinct of self-preservation asserted itself, and advised me wisely. I immediately realised that I should be pursued; and, instead of descending to the river-bank, I hurried to my former hiding-place, and there replaced the weapon which I had no further use of. The papers I kept, and burned in my cell."

"And you made your way back to the prison while the sub-prefect and Mouleydier were hunting for you on the bank of the river, I suppose?"

"Yes; Madame Marteau subsequently told me what occurred. She had fastened a knotted rope to her window-sill, and a quarter of an hour after the shot was fired, I was safe in my cell. This, my dear cousin, is a complete and truthful account of the whole unfortunate affair."

"I believe you, and I forgive you," said M. de Sigoulès, extending his hand to his cousin, who pressed it warmly and exclaimed: "Now I am indifferent to everything else. I am ready to die."

"But I will not have you die! You shall merely go into exile for awhile. That is quite punishment enough. Before your departure, you must place your written confession in my hands, and I will leave no means untried to secure a pardon for you. I will see the Prince-President, and tell him the whole truth. Plancoët, who has a great deal of influence at court, can easily obtain an audience for me, and it will be strange if between us we don't succeed in arranging the matter satisfactorily. You will not be pursued, for the very good reason that the authorities will understand that you would certainly be acquitted even if captured, and that your acquittal would be a severe blow for a government that numbered a scoundrel like this Santelli among its agents. So you see, you will get off with a short sojourn in some foreign land."

"I hope so. But how about Chancelade?"

"Chancelade will be released," replied the count. "I will speak to the investigating magistrate at Salviac. He is a very worthy man, and he will understand the situation perfectly; even if the worst comes to the worst, and he finds himself unable to stop the prosecution, you may rest assured that no jury will be found in the department of the Dordogne willing to condemn Chancelade."

"I agree, with you, that he will probably be acquitted," replied Adhémar; "but Mademoiselle Bernache won't be satisfied with this assurance. You just told me that she insists upon an immediate confession of my guilt so that her lover may be sure of a speedy release."

"What business is it of hers?" growled M. de Sigoulès. "She may be in love with Chancelade, but Chancelade does not share her passion. His sister as much as told us that he was in love with Madame Santelli."

"Mademoiselle Bernache can hardly know that. If she did, she would

turn against him ; but as long as she is deceived in regard to his real sentiments—”

“I will undeceive her, then, even if I have to call upon her in person. Besides, we have forty-eight hours at our disposal ; let us profit by them. You must write a full confession immediately, without omitting anything you have just told me, or adding anything to it. You must trust this confession to me, and, this evening, at midnight, you must take the train for Havre. I will give you two hundred louis to defray your first expenses, and send you a letter of credit when you reach New York.”

“I am deeply grateful for your kindness, but you forget that I have a duel on my hands.”

“Oh ! never mind the duel ! Some absurd quarrel with a fellow as hare-brained as yourself ! It isn't worth while for you to postpone your departure for a trifle like that. So just give your adversary the slip.”

“You are very much mistaken. The difficulty is a serious one, and cannot be neglected. I am to fight with Monsieur Marteau.”

“What ! the fellow who was chief-warder at the Salviac prison ? The detective and spy ! You are certainly mad, my dear cousin. A gentleman cannot fight with such a fellow !”

“I accepted his challenge and can't back out. Besides, he was once a non-commissioned officer in the army.”

“A fine reason, that !”

“But he has an undoubted right to demand satisfaction. He knows I was his wife's lover, and that she allowed me to leave the prison at night-time ; so, it was in his power to have me arrested had he chosen ; and if he prefers to fight, it is no doubt because he is afraid of compromising his wife, and because he hopes to kill me. If I don't fight with him, he will not fail to resort to a speedy and terrible vengeance. He will report the facts to his superiors, and I shall be immediately arrested. You see, my dear cousin, that it is absolutely necessary for me to fight.”

“Was this duel decided upon yesterday ?” inquired the count.

“Yes, in front of the hotel. I surprised Marteau hiding in the passage of one of the houses opposite. He was waiting for Mademoiselle Chancelade to come out, so that he might follow her, and I compelled him to take himself off.”

“Why didn't you speak of this incident before ?”

“Because I should have been obliged to enter into particulars which I hoped to conceal from you ; besides, I preferred to wait until Marteau had sent his seconds to see me.”

“Have they called on you yet ?”

“Yes, this morning, just as I was starting out to try the horse you think of purchasing. Marteau sent two old troopers who are not at all of aristocratic appearance, but they seem worthy men. They both wore decorations.”

“You ought to have sent them to me. What did you say to them ?”

“I wished to spare you the disagreeable duty of receiving them, but I took the liberty of telling them that you and one of your friends would serve as my seconds.”

“Certainly ; but how about the conditions of the duel ?”

“I accepted those which were proposed by Marteau. We are to meet to-morrow morning at nine o'clock in the dry moat of the fortifications, between the gates of Saint-Ouen and Clignancourt.”

“What weapons are to be used ?”

"Sabres. I should have preferred rapiers, but it seems that Marteau acted as fencing-master of his regiment, a cavalry one. He is probably an adept; but I can handle the sabre tolerably well and I flatter myself that I shall be able to settle him."

"Unless he runs you through the body first."

"If he kills me, that will end the matter; but if, on the contrary, I send him to join his ancestors, I shall have an excellent excuse for my hasty departure for America. In either case, you must take charge of my affairs, and those of Chancelade."

M. de Sigoulès seemed thoughtful, and it was very evident that he did not share Adhémar's confidence. The baron now continued, carelessly: "At present all I want you to do is to find another second."

"I shall take Captain Ratibal, my old comrade in the guards. He is a man who will ask no questions."

"You accept, then?"

"Yes, though very reluctantly, I assure you; but I am obliged to admit that it seems to be the best way of ending the matter, and that being the case, we must lose no time. Go up to your room, and write out your confession, dwelling upon Santelli's antecedents, and calling attention to the fact that premeditation was entirely out of the question. You certainly did not leave the prison with the intention of killing him, as you could not have foreseen the meeting. I shall now go in search of Ratibal, and hope to find him at home."

"Very well, cousin," answered Adhémar, cheerfully. "We shall dine together, I suppose? And on your return I will submit to you a statement which will prove satisfactory, I trust."

The two gentlemen then cordially shook hands, and as Adhémar started for his room, the count rang the bell to order a cab. Five minutes afterwards he was rolling swiftly along towards Montmartre, and a quarter of an hour later, he alighted at the door of Madame Gouverneur's boarding-house.

The captain had not yet returned home, and the count, while strolling about the garden, waiting for him, was not a little surprised, at a turn in the path, to find himself face to face with Jacques, his former gamekeeper. "What are you doing here, you rascal?" asked M. de Sigoulès sternly. "Do you want to compromise your friend's sister?"

"I am here with Mademoiselle Chancelade's permission," calmly replied Jacques. "If you doubt it, you have only to question her. She is coming now."

"Do you know what has happened to Chancelade?"

"Yes; he was arrested yesterday."

"And aren't you afraid that you will meet with a similar fate?"

"Oh! the people who have arrested him won't trouble themselves about me."

"Don't be over sure of that. But tell me, is it really true that you hope to marry Edmée?"

"We are betrothed; but as long as her brother is in prison—"

"I shall soon have him out again."

"If you do that, sir, there is nothing I could refuse you; I would obey you like a dog obeys his master."

"I shall only ask you to follow an honest calling, so that your wife need not be ashamed of you."

"There is Edmée now!" exclaimed Jacques, pointing to the end of the walk.

The count hastily turned, and saw Mademoiselle Chancelade approaching on the arm of her new friend. He advanced to meet them, hat in hand. "In a few days your brother will be free, my dear Edmée," he said, kindly; "for I shall be able to prove that it was not he who killed Monsieur Santelli." And then, turning to the young widow, he added: "I am happy to be able to assure you that he is innocent of that crime, madame."

These words were accompanied by such a meaning look, that Madame Santelli blushed, and Edmée seemed considerably surprised. "Good!" thought the old nobleman; "she is still ignorant of her travelling-companion's real name; and it is probable that Chancelade is no wiser. So much the better! There will be time enough to tell them the truth, when Adhémar has reached America."

"We shall all bless you," exclaimed the young girl, in her delight.

"Even that scapegrace, Jacques?" asked M. de Sigoulès, with a smile.

"You forgive him, then?"

"What! for throwing away the gamekeeper's badge I fastened upon his arm? Yes, certainly. He is worthy of a better position, and if he likes to become my tenant, there is nothing to prevent him from succeeding your father. I would rather have seen him a soldier, but he would be obliged to leave the neighbourhood of Salviac, and I suppose he is anxious to go and live there now. My farm-house is only fit for a married man; so there will be room for another family at your place at Salviac," added the count, with another sly glance at the commissary's widow.

"My father will not witness our happiness," murmured Edmée, sadly.

"Who knows? People return from everywhere nowadays—even from Guiana. I shall petition for his pardon, and I by no means despair of obtaining it."

"Monsieur le Comte," now said Madame Santelli, in a tone of deep emotion, "you seem to be able to read all hearts, and you must have divined that the time is not yet come for me to prove you my gratitude."

"It will soon come, my dear madame. In the meantime, will you tell me where and how poor Louis was arrested?"

"He was arrested but a short distance from here. I was with him at the time. He was betrayed by a woman."

"By the same woman who spent several days with the jailer's wife at Salviac," added Edmée.

"That is strange!" murmured M. de Sigoulès, thoughtfully.

He could not understand why Mademoiselle Bernache was now endeavouring to save a man she had betrayed, but he kept his thoughts to himself. He had just seen his friend, the captain, enter the garden, and he was anxious to consult him respecting the duel that was to take place on the morrow.

"I must leave you, my dear child, and you, madame, also," he hastily said. "Here comes my old comrade, Ratibal, and I must see him immediately. I shall call on you again in the course of two or three days, and I shall have some good news for you, I hope. Trust me until then. And you, my boy, must keep your eyes open, and try not to get caught," he added, looking at Jacques and making a warning gesture with his forefinger.

Then, turning upon his heel, he left the trio without further ceremony.

## XII.

IN the month of February, the sun is a late riser, and very frequently it does not show itself at all to the Parisians. It was certainly invisible on the morning appointed for the duel upon which the fate of so many persons depended. At nine o'clock, a heavy fog still covered the Plain of Saint Denis with a grey mantle, and gathered in thick masses in the dry moats of the fortifications. One could not see ten yards ahead of one, and the market gardeners who were returning from the Halles did not dare to trot their horses for fear of an accident, but proceeded at a walk along the road leading from the gate of Saint Ouen, the cold, damp atmosphere chilling them to the marrow of their bones.

At that time there were no octroi stations in this neighbourhood, for Paris was still bounded by the old wall ; consequently, one could fight in the moats without fear of being disturbed, and duels were correspondingly frequent, as the spot was more convenient, besides being nearer than the woods of Vincennes or Meudon. At that time the suburbs of Paris did not stretch so far, and sots were not then attracted by innumerable taverns as nowadays. On the northern side of Paris the country began at the Butte Montmartre, and not long before one could have gone rabbit shooting on the Monceau Plain, now covered with superb mansions.

Adhémar de Mussidan and his seconds left the Hôtel du Helder in a cab, and reached the gate of Saint Ouen at a quarter to nine. Leaving the vehicle there, they started on foot for the meeting-place, which had not been designated in a very explicit manner, as both parties had merely agreed that the duel should take place somewhere between the gate of Saint Ouen and the gate of Clignancourt. Thus, the baron and his friends had to follow the outer edge of the moat until they found their opponents.

Ratibal, who had served in a cavalry regiment, had brought two sabres, selected with great care—two sabres of equal length and weight, which he carried in a green baize wrapper under his arm. He had the tact to walk on ahead, in order to enable the Count de Sigoulès to have a private chat with his relative, and he had already given proofs of his discretion by not inquiring into the causes of the duel. In short, the old soldier was a model second. The count and his cousin had very little to say to each other, however, for they had dined together on the evening before, and all matters connected with the duel had then been thoroughly discussed.

Every contingency had been provided for. Adhémar had in his pocket a sum of money which would more than suffice to take him to America in case he killed Marteau and escaped without serious injury ; but if, on the contrary, he proved the victim, M. de Sigoulès was in possession of his will, together with a very explicit statement that completely exculpated Chancelade, with proofs to support it in the shape of a description of the rifle now in the hands of the Salviac officials, and the bill of the commission agent who had sold the weapon to the Baron de Mussidan.

The latter walked briskly along, with his hands in his overcoat-pockets, and a cigar in his mouth, as indifferent, and even gayer than ever. He was not ill-pleased at the idea of risking his life to terminate an intolerable state of things, and also to atone for an act which was closely akin to a crime. M. de Sigoulès, on the contrary, was deeply affected. He had forgiven his young cousin, he almost excused him, in fact, and his



heart sunk at the thought that his last remaining relative might soon fall beneath the sword of a coarse and brutal police spy. The old nobleman, who, personally, feared nothing, shrunk with terror from the prospect of his race dying out. He had had good cause to complain of Adhémar, but he had always entertained great affection for him, and had fully intended to leave him all his property, on condition that he would add the name of Sigoulès to that of Mussidan.

"You seem to be in very good spirits this morning," he remarked, suddenly.

"Excellent, my dear cousin," replied Adhémar, blithely. "I slept like a dormouse last night, regaled myself with a big cup of coffee this morning, and then amused myself by practising with my cane several very clever strokes which a cuirassier of my acquaintance once taught me. Monsieur Marteau will have a hard time of it. I am beginning to believe that it is my destiny to make women widows," he added, laughing. "Jeanne Bastide is already indebted to me for her liberty, and I think that in the course of an hour or two, the fair Aurélie will be free to marry a more attractive man than the boor from whom I am about to deliver her."

"You talk like a Gascon—"

"All natives of Périgord are half Gascons, my dear cousin."

"All the same, your remarks seem to me very much out of place, and you choose your time for jesting very badly. You ought to reflect carefully, and indeed, if you have any further request to make of me, now is the time."

"I haven't one. We settled everything last night, you recollect, and you were kind enough to promise to pay my debts."

"You will not regret anything then, if misfortune should befall you?"

"To speak frankly, I shall not regret parting with any one but you, for I have never really been attached to any one else. My love for Jeanne Bastide was only a fleeting passion, kindled by youth, and soon extinguished by absence. As for other women, including Madame Marteau, they were only passing whims. Respecting Santelli, he had wronged me so deeply that I feel no remorse. It would have been better, perhaps, if I had not killed him; but after all, he only got his deserts."

M. de Sigoulès insisted no further; he could not hope to convert this confirmed sceptic in a moment.

"Do you know what I think?" continued Mussidan. "I fancy that our friend Marteau may disappoint us. He has changed his mind, perhaps, since he sent his seconds to me. This much is certain: we have been walking ten minutes or more, and as yet I see no signs of the fair Aurélie's husband."

"He is probably waiting for us further on."

"I hope so, for I shouldn't care to repeat this promenade, in such cold weather, and with so thick a fog. But it would be even less pleasant if this amiable personage had brought some police officers as seconds in view of effecting my arrest, instead of fighting with me."

"I scarcely know whether I shouldn't prefer that," muttered the count.

"But no; Ratibal has stopped. He has probably caught sight of your opponent and his seconds." In point of fact, the captain, who had been walking ahead like an advanced guard, had suddenly come to a halt.

"The deuce take me if I can see them!" growled Mussidan. "It is as much as I can do to see him."

"He is beckoning to us. Let us quicken our pace," remarked the count.

They had soon overtaken the captain, who said to them: "The gentlemen are there, below, in the moat, and I think they are getting impatient."

"It is their own fault. Why did they go so far?" replied Mussidan.

"I suppose they left the city by the Clignancourt gate, and chose that particular spot because a path leads down into the moat there."

"Very likely. Everywhere else the bank is nearly perpendicular, while here there is a tolerably good path. Ah! Vauban's system of fortification is a good one, it provides duellists with great facilities for fighting."

"You talk too much; let us make haste," rejoined M. de Sigoulès, impatiently.

Ratibal's eyes had not deceived him. Three men were really pacing to and fro at the bottom of the moat, and their figures were dimly visible through the fog. Adhémar and his friends descended in Indian file, the captain leading the way, and a moment later they found themselves in the presence of the enemy.

Pierre Marteau, in a coat buttoned to the chin, had an expression that Adhémar had never seen upon his face before. His contracted features, compressed lips, glittering eyes, and scowling brow, all indicated that he was consumed with anger and hatred. He had never been a handsome man, but that day he looked positively frightful. His companions had the hard faces of old troopers, degraded by the abuse of strong liquors. The Count de Sigoulès had never before found himself in such low company, though he had fought at least twenty duels in his time.

The adverse party had also taken the precaution to bring a pair of sabres, which they had already unsheathed, in order that there might be no loss of time. A formal exchange of bows took place, and then the party began to make final preparations for the combat. Ratibal produced his weapons, and the two pairs were found to be exactly alike. The choice of weapons was decided by throwing a five-franc piece in the air, and luck favoured M. de Mussidan, who, probably out of bravado, decided to use the sabres brought by his opponent. The conditions had been decided upon in advance, but a tall fellow with a red face, who was one of Marteau's seconds, felt called upon to say: "It is understood, I suppose, that the duel will last until one of the combatants is on the ground. We haven't come here to inflict a scratch or two, and afterwards have a pair of ducks plucked for lunch."

"Be easy," replied Adhémar, in his blandest voice. "The duel will continue until one of us is only fit for the grave."

"Coats off, gentlemen," commanded the count, in order to put an end to this conversation.

Mussidan, without a word, divested himself of his over-coat, coat, and waistcoat, tightened the waistband of his trousers, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, took one of the sabres presented to him, stuck the point of it in the grass and waited. M. de Sigoulès could not help admiring his relative's bearing under arms; an old decorated veteran could not have carried himself more gallantly in the presence of the enemy.

Marteau, much less prepossessing in appearance, but equally composed, took his weapon and made a few passes as if wishing to familiarize himself with it. "It is perfectly understood that straight thrusts are allowable?" he said, in a loud voice.

"Anything is allowable, except giving ground," replied Mussidan.

The seconds now placed the two opponents, and the captain was about to give the signal, when one of the ex-jailer's friends exclaimed: "One moment, gentlemen!"

"Do you propose favouring us with a speech after the fashion of masters-of-arms, when conscripts are going to fight for the first time?" cried Adhémar, impatiently.

"I'm not such a fool, young gentleman; only I wish to call your attention to the fact that some one is watching us up there."

Adhémar and the others looked up, and fancied they could distinguish a man on the brow of the slope they had just descended.

"What of it?" asked M. de Mussidan.

"Well, it strikes me that this person may interfere as soon as the fun begins. I think we had better go a little further on."

"It would be just the same if we did, and I have tramped far enough already. Let us end it here."

"Especially as, if we delay matters, the fog will rise," added Ratibal, "and in that case, any persons who may happen to be about up there will see us."

"Besides, the man has gone on his way," remarked M. de Sigoulès. "I don't see any more of him."

The person referred to had, in fact, disappeared, and there seemed to be no further reason for postponing the conflict. "Are you ready?" asked Ratibal.

"Yes," replied both opponents in the same breath.

"Then set to, gentlemen."

Adhémar and his antagonist both took two steps forward, and their blades crossed. Fencing with the sabre is a peculiar accomplishment. The passes are varied and intricate, and the engagement may be either dangerous, or almost harmless, according to the will of the seconds and the temperament of the combatants. Between troopers, when the quarrel is some trivial barracks affair, no great harm is generally done; the provost-major intervenes on all dangerous occasions, and upon the infliction of the first scratch, military honour is declared satisfied. But it is a very different thing when the quarrel is between men who really wish to kill one another, and this time each of the opponents had sworn to exterminate the other.

By the very manner in which Marteau placed himself on guard, one could see that he was expert in the use of the weapon. He was at a slight disadvantage on account of his height, for he was much shorter than Adhémar, and he consequently first had to think of shielding himself from downward cuts. His forearm protected his head, and he seemed resolved to await the attack, ready to parry, and to take advantage of his opponent's first blunder so as to make a straight lunge at him. He did not have to wait long.

M. de Mussidan began the combat with such a quick and powerful whirl of his sabre that it was as much as Marteau could do to save his skull; he was unable to avoid a slight cut on the shoulder. His shirt being stained with blood, Ratibal called out to the combatants to stop; but the infuriated husband paid no attention to the injunction, and, profiting by the moment when Adhémar, more obedient than himself, drew slightly back, he attacked him in turn, but with the point of his weapon, openly and directly.

Adhémar was not sorry of this, for he was a good fencer with rapiers, and the first bout had tired him a little. It was now a question of skill after a

violent exercise ; almost a rest, pending a resumption of the slashing business. There began a series of feints, extrications, less rapid than with rapiers, on account of the greater weight and width of the blades, resounding parades, ringing out like hammers striking upon an anvil, and quick thrusts invariably met by each antagonist. And all this was without any result, for neither of the opponents possessed any marked superiority over the other.

In a protracted contest like this, even the most robust finally become weary, and the least nervous irritable. Adhémar, exasperated by the sight of his antagonist's coarse and distorted face, resolved to put an end to the combat ; and, rushing suddenly upon his opponent with his sabre lifted high in the air, without thinking of shielding himself, he split his skull just as his enemy made a savage lunge and pierced his breast. It was all so quickly accomplished that the seconds only realised what had taken place on seeing both men fall. Mussidan fell backward, as if he had been overturned by a cannon-ball. Marteau staggered, spun round waving his arms wildly, dropped his sabre, and then sunk to the ground like an ox stunned by a butcher's mallet.

His seconds attempted to raise him, while M. de Sigoulès ran to his unfortunate relative, who gave no further signs of life. The two opponents had died almost simultaneously. The point of Marteau's sabre had reached Adhémar's heart, and the latter's blade had split Marteau's skull open, leaving the brain exposed. "It is all over," muttered the captain, helping up the count, who had thrown himself upon his knees beside the body of his cousin.

The ex-jailer's friends evinced much less emotion, and did not linger to bestow futile care upon their former comrade. "Gentlemen, everything was conducted in the prescribed way," remarked the older of the two men. "You can testify to that with us, I presume, if the authorities should take it into their heads to bother us. Shall I go for the gendarmes ? I know where to find the nearest barracks."

"Do as you like," replied Ratibal. "I am going to take my friend away. He cannot remain here with the body of his relative."

"Some one must stay here, otherwise it will be supposed that this was a double murder. My comrade can remain to guard the bodies while I summon the gendarmes or the first policeman I happen to meet."

"Very well. You know where I live. Monsieur de Sigoulès is stopping at the Hôtel du Helder. We shall hold ourselves at your disposal, and I shall expect to see you before the evening."

The count allowed himself to be led away without a word. Deep sorrows are mute. He reascended the bank, leaning on the captain's arm, and when they reached the summit, they found themselves face to face with Jacques. "What are you doing here ?" inquired the old nobleman, sternly.

"I knew that your cousin was going to fight this morning. No one told me so ; but I guessed as much yesterday, when you came to see the captain, and I hid myself in order to overhear your arrangements. I wished to be the first to inform some one whom you know, and I saw everything—"

"Ah ! well, go and tell Edmée that Adhémar de Mussidan is dead, and that his death saves Louis, for he has left in my keeping written proofs of the innocence of your future brother-in-law. Marry, and try to be happy. There is nothing left for me now but to creep into a corner and die, like an old worn-out horse."

"You forget that we shall be near you."

The count passed on without replying, and Jacques dared not follow him. So he proceeded towards the gate of Clignancourt, in order to return to Paris by a different road. He had no cause to regret the death of M. de Mussidan, whom he scarcely knew, and he could but rejoice at the death of Marteau, whom he cordially hated. He was chiefly interested, of course, in the possible consequences of this duel, as far as Louis Chancelade and Edmée were concerned. M. de Sigonlès had just reassured him; but he had no idea how the old nobleman could be in a position to prove that Chancelade had not killed the commissary.

He had a slight suspicion that the real murderer might be M. de Mussidan, as the jailer's pretty wife had allowed the baron to leave the prison at night-time. He also suspected that the lady in question was the cause of the duel in which her lover and her husband had met their death, but there were many serious points in the whole affair which he wished to clear up before seeing Edmée again, and the idea of paying Coralie Bernache a visit occurred to him. He had met her immediately after Louis' arrest. It was she who had first informed him of it, and had acquainted him with the part Madame Marteau had played at Salviac; and she probably knew much more than she had told him on that occasion. Jacques felt sure of being cordially received, as she had once offered to conceal him in her apartments, and she certainly would not refuse to enlighten him if she had it in her power to do so. Edmée and her friend were eagerly awaiting his return to Madame Gouverneur's, but he passed round Montmartre without stopping, and wended his way straight to the Rue Mogador.

Coralie's maid, knowing that her mistress had received him on his first visit, promptly ushered him into the drawing-room where he found the two friends, Mademoiselle Bernache, whom he knew tolerably well, and Madame Marteau, whom he had never seen before, but whom he recognised from Chancelade's description. Coralie received him with evident delight, introduced him to the jailer's wife, and then eagerly exclaimed: "So here you are at last! I have been expecting you for two days past. What news do you bring me?"

"I have just seen the Count de Sigoulès," replied Jacques, "and he tells me that Louis is saved."

"Saved!" exclaimed Coralie. "And how?"

"It seems that Monsieur de Mussidan has left a statement in which he confesses that it was he who killed the commissary," replied Jacques.

"Has left a statement?" repeated Madame Marteau. "Can he have left the country?"

"He is dead, madame. Your husband killed him."

Madame Marteau turned pale; but she said nothing. It was her friend who asked: "They have fought, then?"

She certainly might have suspected it, as she had done everything in her power to bring about the duel.

"An hour ago," replied Jacques, coldly.

"Were you present?"

"I witnessed the whole affair. They both fell at the same instant."

"What! Marteau, too?"

"Yes. Monsieur de Mussidan split his skull open."

"You are a widow!" exclaimed Coralie, turning to her friend, who sat as if petrified; "you are free! and I shall soon see my lover again. What does all the rest matter to us?"

This was horrible ; and Jacques, whose indignation was now thoroughly aroused, drily asked : " Is it Chancelade whom you call your lover ? "

" You know perfectly well that he is. "

" He may have been, but I feel quite sure that you will never see him again. If he should be released—as I hope—he will soon marry. "

" Marry ! Whom does he intend to marry ? "

" I am not authorised to tell you. "

" Is it the woman I saw at his house on the day he was arrested ? "

" Very possibly. "

" Ah, the wretch ! She escaped me that day, but I will find her again ; and when I do, I will certainly burn her eyes out with vitriol. "

" I advise you not to try it. "

" They may put me in prison for it and try me, but I don't care. When the trial comes off, I'm sure to be acquitted. Women, who are deserted by their lovers are never condemned nowadays. I shall have all the women on my side. "

" I think not, when they know that it was you who betrayed Chancelade to the police. "

" That is false. "

" Spare yourself the trouble of telling a falsehood. Chancelade told the whole story to a person who repeated it to me ; and even if Chancelade does not marry that lady, he will never consent to see you again. You betrayed him ; you delivered him up to the police, so everything is at an end between you and him. Oh ! I know you are sorry for what you did, and that you afterwards turned against Monsieur de Mussidan. I know that it was you who brought about this duel in which two men have met their death, but that is only another reason why Chancelade should never forgive you. "

Coralie hung her head beneath this avalanche of bitter truths, for she was beginning to realise the position in which she had placed herself. She would not admit her defeat, but the bandage was falling from her eyes—the bandage that passion had placed there—and with that mobility of mind which was such a prominent trait in her character, she was already beginning to ask herself how she could ever have let her anger carry her sufficiently away to make her perpetrate such terrible blunders. Two men dead by her fault, and her own unfortunate passion doomed to disappointment ; this was certainly enough to destroy her illusions, and bring her back to the realities of life. She was already thinking of her Russian prince again, and even a little bit of Vignory. With these two she was at least sure that the comedy would not become a tragedy.

Jacques, by speaking to her in this stern and uncompromising manner, had, so to speak, killed two birds with one stone. The fair Aurélie was overwhelmed with consternation. She, too, could now measure the depths of the abyss into which she had voluntarily thrown herself. She was now probably alone in the world, for in all likelihood General de Plancoët would give her the cold shoulder after such a tragical affair. She bitterly reproached herself for having sent Adhémar de Mussidan to his death. She even thought with regret of Pierre Marteau—the indulgent husband who had so patiently submitted to her whims. Married, Aurélie de Saint-Amour had still been something ; a widow, she was no longer anything at all. She might perhaps turn to the stage, but her voice was failing her ; and as regards acting, she only knew how to sit still and look pretty. And, moreover, as she was getting on in years, she might soon have to mourn the loss even of her good looks.

Jacques was beginning to regret that he had come here in search of information which he could easily have dispensed with, while two virtuous women were anxiously waiting for him. He realised now, when it was too late, that he had yielded to a foolish impulse, and he resolved to retire and leave these two heartless creatures to console each other as they could.

"I suppose that you have nothing more to say to me?" he asked.

Neither woman made any reply; so, renouncing any attempt to obtain further information from them, he took his leave, and they made no effort to detain him. In fact, they probably preferred to discuss the consequences of this twofold catastrophe in private.

Jacques, being an untiring walker, now proceeded to the Rue des Abbesses, where he found Edmée and Jeanne seated side by side on a bench in Madame Gouverneur's garden. He at once told them what had occurred that morning in the moat of the fortifications, but though he carefully omitted all harrowing details—knowing the tender hearts of his listeners—he had to tell them the general facts, and when they learned that both adversaries were dead, they burst into tears.

Jacques could not help comparing this sincere grief with the selfishness of the women he had just left. They had not even wept—those heartless creatures, one of whom had lost both a husband and a lover, whom the other had condemned to death, merely to gratify a feeling of personal spite. Jacques, who had spent most of his life in the forests, was beginning to gain some insight into the real character of fashionable Parisian damsels, whom Barrière wrongly styled "women of marble," for they have hearts, but these hearts are compounded of straw and mud. The straw takes fire sometimes, but the mud remains, and the transient flames serve to harden it. Jacques pitied his friend, who had momentarily been caught in the toils of one of these sirens, and swore to profit by the lesson—an unnecessary resolve, for his life of adventure was over, and he did not regret it. The truest happiness, that which consists in leading a quiet life with the woman one loves, was now within his reach.

Edmée could not believe him. She was still in doubt as to whether the judicial officials would really admit and proclaim Louis Chancelade's innocence. Jacques had a great deal of difficulty in reviving her courage, and in persuading her that Adhémar de Mussidan's confession would not be disputed. He finally succeeded, however, and the day did not elapse before good news arrived to confirm his predictions.

Ratibal returned home at two o'clock. The count, who no longer had any reasons for concealing the truth from him, had explained the situation, and the captain now announced that M. de Sigoulès had gone straight to work to set matters right. Overcoming his grief, the old nobleman had repaired to the residence of General de Plancoët, and the latter had agreed to secure him that very day an audience with Prince Louis Napoleon, President of the Republic and future emperor, who, it might be hoped, would gladly avail himself of this opportunity to atone for the undue severity of one of his agents. And if the result of this audience was such as M. de Sigoulès hoped, he intended to come and announce the good news to the prisoner's sister.

Madame Santelli felt that she was in the way, and returned to her room. Ratibal, who was expecting a visit from Marteau's seconds, went out into the street to smoke his pipe and waylay the old troopers, whose rough manners and appearances might have scandalised Madame Gouverneur.

However, Edmée remained in the garden with Jacques, and the hours dragged heavily until the unfortunate Adhémar's cousin arrived, looking at least ten years older, bowed down with grief, and leaning heavily upon his cane for support. They ran to meet him, and in a voice that faltered with emotion, he exclaimed : "Don't weep any longer ; and don't pity me. I shall never recover from the blow I have received ; but at least I shall have made some one happy before dying. You will soon see Louis Chancelade again."

"What ! he is free ?" exclaimed Edmée, forgetting in her joy the grief of this old man who had just seen the last of his race perish.

"Not yet. He will be transferred to Salviac, where the investigation will be continued, but he will not remain in prison long, for the magistrate will have conclusive proofs of his innocence before him. Nor will he be tried on any other charge. I have received a formal assurance of that. No one will ask him where he was on the evening the commissary was killed. I have even obtained a promise that his father shall be pardoned."

"Pardoned ! And it was the Prince-President who—"

"Yes, my dear Edmée. I have done for your brother and for you what I wouldn't have done for any one else, not even for Adhémar. I have not abjured my convictions, but I have done violence to my feelings by applying to the man who has usurped the place of our lawful king. However, I do not regret my appeal to his sense of justice. Now, my life is virtually ended. I shall leave for Salviac to-morrow."

"Not without us !" exclaimed the two young people in the same breath.

## EPILOGUE.

ONE lovely May morning, three months after Adhémar de Mussidan's tragical death, the bells of the old church of Salviac were ringing a joyous peal. A marriage is always an important event in a country town, and two weddings celebrated at the same time, seldom fail to bring out the entire population. And such strange marriages ! The beautiful, well-behaved, and charming Edmée, marrying a poacher, a sort of Robin Hood, without a penny of fortune or even a home ! Louis Chancelade marrying the widow of the official whom he had been accused of murdering ! Father Chancelade, safely returned from Cayenne, gave his daughter away, and Madame Santelli was escorted to the altar by her nearest relative, a merchant of Bordeaux. And what was stranger still, the civil authorities of Salviac, including the new sub-prefect, Vignory's successor, and M. Bourdeille, the presiding judge of the civil court, walked in the bridal procession. However, people remarked that the Public Prosecutor and his ungracious assessor, M. Bizouin, were absent, as well as M. Braconne, the advocate. The latter had at one time cherished a hope of marrying Edmée Chancelade ; and he had not yet become reconciled to his disappointment, though, like most people, he cordially approved of the decision in Louis' case.

It may be remarked that the investigating magistrate, who was naturally discreet, and who was not called upon to explain to his superiors the reasons for his decision, had told no one about the Baron de Mussidan's written confession which had been placed in his hands. The secret was known only to himself, the public prosecutor, the minister of justice, and the unfortunate Count de Sigoulès, who was not likely to survive his relative for long, as he was virtually dying of grief and mortification. He was not



able to be present at the double wedding, and worthy Dr. Thiviers, who attended him, was of opinion that he could not last six months longer.

General de Plancoët also knew the truth, but he lived a long way from Périgord, and had many other matters to engross his attention. He had done his duty in obtaining M. de Sigoulès an audience with Prince Louis Napoleon and thus contributing to save an innocent man; and he had not merely contented himself with that. The count had acquainted him with what he knew of Madame Marteau's conduct and he (the general) had thereupon discreetly started an inquiry, applying to Coralie for information with the promise of a reward. She was only too glad to earn some money; for her Russian admirer had written to her saying that he should not return to Paris, and she was now sorely in lack of funds. She, accordingly, revealed all Aurélie's secrets to M. de Plancoët, who thereupon informed the jailer's pretty widow that he intended to have nothing more to do with her.

Coralie soon spent the money she obtained from the general, and when she tried to renew her acquaintance with Vignory, who was fast squandering the fortune he had recently inherited, she met with utter failure, and had to turn her attention to the stage again. One day, while she was waiting to see the manager of the Fantaisies Comiques, Aurélie, likewise anxious to secure an engagement, came into the ante-room. Some bitter words were exchanged at first, but, as might be expected with such creatures, they soon "made it up," and a fortnight previous to the weddings at Salviac they had become faster friends than ever. They obtained engagements with a theatrical company at Périgueux, and whilst there, Martial Mouleydier, who had met Coralie in Paris, and who, after his return home, had kept up a correspondence with her, wrote word of the coming marriages. The two women were immediately seized with the foolish idea of repairing to Salviac in view of deriding the happy pairs, and with their usual improvidence they threw up their engagements, despite the protestations of their manager, and started from Périgueux in a post-chaise, bound for the little town which had witnessed their earlier escapades.

It was an unfortunate idea. Just as the brides and bridegrooms were leaving the church, the good folks of Salviac saw Aurélie and Coralie alight from their chaise, at the end of the High Street. The foolish creatures were immediately recognised, and not merely hissed, but pelted with mud and stones. Quite dismayed, they clambered with all haste into the vehicle and bade the postilion whip up his horses. In this they acted wisely; for if they had tarried in Salviac, they would have been stoned to death.

Four-and-thirty years have elapsed since the events which we have related occurred. Edmée is now a grandmother, and Louis Chancelade a widower. Their lives have been quiet and happy, whilst France has two or three times changed its government. Both Aurélie and Coralie, after a brief career on the stage, resorted to a life of dissipation, and, finally, came to a bad end. It is as well to remember in life, that, sooner or later, we are all of us rewarded or punished according to our deserts.

THE END.

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